Aboriginal Quality of Life

Quality of Life of Aboriginal People in Canada

An Analysis of Current Research

Daniel Salée
with the assistance of
David Newhouse and
Carole Lévesque

IRPP

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Aboriginal Quality of Life / Qualité de vie des Autochtones

Research Director/ Directeur de recherche

F. Leslie Seidle

With this publication, the IRPP is launching a new research program, Aboriginal Quality of Life, which will include a series of studies examining recent innovations in public policies, programs and partnerships involving Aboriginal people. This program builds on research carried out as part of the institute's Art of the State III project, notably the contributions of Evelyn Peters, Joyce Green and Ian Peach, and John Richards to the forthcoming IRPP volume *Belonging? Diversity Recognition and Shared Citizenship in Canada.*

The situation of many of Canada's Aboriginal people is one of the country's most pressing public policy questions. Based on a range of indicators, from income and unemployment levels to health indicators (such as the incidence of diabetes), there are significant gaps in life chances between many Aboriginal and most non-Aboriginal Canadians. There has been progress in some areas. For example, the proportion of Aboriginal people aged 25 to 34 living in Toronto, Montreal, Vancouver, Winnipeg, Calgary and Saskatoon who completed post-secondary education rose significantly between 1981 and 2001. Nonetheless, measures such as the United Nations Human Development Index continue to underline the unacceptable disparities between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people in Canada.

As Daniel Salée recounts in his thoughtful analysis of a wide range of research and other literature, governments and Aboriginal communities have made sincere attempts to improve Aboriginal socio-economic conditions. The Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples saw self-government as a key to allow Aboriginal communities to mould a better future. However, negotiations have been painfully slow, and few new agreements have been signed in the past decade or so (the 1999 Nisga'a treaty is one notable exception). That said, some policy makers are paying greater attention to the potential of targeted interventions and partnerships (both between governments and with other sectors) for improving outcomes. The Urban Aboriginal Strategy the federal government launched in 1998 is one example of this apparent shift. In light of the diversity among Canada's Aboriginal communities and the fact that half the country's Aboriginal people live in cities, collaborative approaches need to be pursued with considerably more vigour.

Consistent with its mandate to contribute to the public policy decision-making process in Canada, the IRPP plans to publish several more studies as part of this research program. The authors will report relevant data on the quality of life of Aboriginal people, including trends over time; present case studies of innovations in public policies and programs in the given policy sector, including how the innovations were developed and implemented (e.g. partnerships, intergovernmental agreements); and assess the results of the innovations – including, where possible, the impact on outcomes and lessons learned. The studies will be situated within a broader context, including historical and constitutional factors. It is hoped that one or two studies will examine the linkages between community capacity (including institutional development and governance) and socio-economic outcomes.

This research program was developed in consultation with an advisory committee that includes Joyce Green (University of Regina), Carole Lévesque (Institut national de la recherche scientifique), David Newhouse (Trent University) and Daniel Salée (Concordia University). On behalf of the IRPP, I wish to express our sincere appreciation to these colleagues for their active interest in this program and their valued suggestions and sound advice on how to address these important research questions.

Cette publication de l'IRPP inaugure un nouveau programme de recherche sur la qualité de vie des Autochtones, qui comprendra une série d'études consacrées aux innovations récentes apportées aux politiques et programmes et aux partenariats avec les Autochtones. Le programme de recherche s'inspire des travaux menés dans le cadre du projet de l'IRPP sur l'art de l'État, volume III, et en particulier des contributions d'Evelyn Peters, de Joyce Green et Ian Peach, et de John Richards à l'ouvrage de l'IRPP en voie de publication, intitulé *Belonging? Diversity, Recognition and Shared Citizenship in Canada.*

La situation d'un grand nombre d'Autochtones est l'une des questions les plus urgentes auxquelles doit s'attaquer la politique publique au Canada. Plusieurs indicateurs, depuis les niveaux de revenu et de chômage jusqu'aux indicateurs de santé (l'incidence du diabète, par exemple), soulignent l'écart important

qui existe entre de nombreux Autochtones et la majorité des non-Autochtones du point de vue de leurs conditions de vie. Certes, des progrès ont été enregistrés dans certains domaines. Ainsi, parmi les Autochtones âgés de 25 à 34 ans qui vivent à Toronto, Montréal, Vancouver, Winnipeg, Calgary et Saskatoon, la proportion de ceux qui ont achevé leurs études postsecondaires s'est accrue sensiblement de 1981 à 2001. D'autres indicateurs, tel l'Indice de développement humain des Nations Unies, continuent néanmoins de mettre en lumière les disparités inacceptables qui persistent entre Autochtones et non-Autochtones.

Comme l'indique Daniel Salée dans son analyse approfondie d'un large éventail de travaux de recherche et d'autres publications portant sur ces questions, les gouvernements et les communautés autochtones ont fait des efforts sincères en vue d'améliorer la situation socioéconomique des Autochtones. Pour la Commission royale sur les peuples autochtones, l'autonomie était la clé qui allait permettre aux communautés autochtones de préparer un avenir meilleur. Les négociations ont toutefois traîné en longueur et très peu de nouveaux accords ont été conclus depuis une dizaine d'années, le traité signé avec les Nisga'a en 1999 étant une exception notable. Cela dit, certains responsables politiques s'intéressent davantage aux possibilités offertes par les interventions et les partenariats ciblés (entre gouvernements ou avec le secteur privé) pour améliorer la situation. La Stratégie pour les Autochtones vivant en milieu urbain, lancée par le gouvernement fédéral en 1998, constitue un exemple de cette réorientation apparente. Compte tenu de la diversité qui caractérise les communautés autochtones du Canada et du fait que la moitié des Autochtones vivent dans les villes, il faudra appliquer des approches axées sur la collaboration de façon beaucoup plus vigoureuse.

Conformément à son mandat, qui consiste à formuler des recommandations destinées à contribuer au processus décisionnel en matière de politiques publiques au Canada, l'IRPP se propose de publier plusieurs études additionnelles dans le cadre de ce programme de recherche. Les auteurs présenteront des données pertinentes sur la qualité de vie des Autochtones, y compris des séries chronologiques permettant de dégager des tendances, décriront des études de cas se rapportant aux innovations apportées aux politiques et programmes publics dans des secteurs déterminés de la politique publique, signalant notamment comment ces innovations ont été élaborées et mises en œuvre (par exemple, les partenariats et les ententes intergouvernementales), et analyseront les résultats de ces innovations, y compris, dans la mesure du possible, leur impact sur la situation des Autochtones et les leçons tirées de ces expériences. Les études s'inscriront dans un contexte plus large, où seront notamment évoqués les facteurs historiques et constitutionnels. On espère qu'une ou deux études se pencheront sur les rapports entre les capacités des communautés autochtones (y compris le développement des institutions et la gouvernance) et leur situation socioéconomique.

Le programme de recherche a été élaboré avec la collaboration d'un comité consultatif qui se compose de Joyce Green (Université de Regina), Carole Lévesque (Institut national de la recherche scientifique), David Newhouse (Université Trent) et Daniel Salée (Université Concordia). Au nom de l'IRPP, je tiens à remercier sincèrement ces collègues pour l'intérêt actif qu'ils ont manifesté envers ce programme et pour les suggestions et conseils judicieux qu'ils ont formulés quant à la façon d'aborder cette importante thématique de recherche.

Acknowledgements

About the Author

Daniel Salée is a professor of political science and Principal of the School of Community and Public Affairs at Concordia University. He also serves as Co-director of the Concordia-UQAM Chair in Ethnic Studies. He is a member of the UQAM-based Centre de recherche sur l'immigration, l'ethnicité et la citoyenneté (CRIEC). His research has focused mainly on the politics of the relations between the French-speaking majority and members of linguistic, cultural, racialized and immigrant minorities and First Peoples in Quebec. His most recent work explores the interface between the national question and citizenship and the politics of state/First Peoples relations in Quebec and Canada.

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Suppose then that our benevolent colonizer has
succeeded in laying aside both the problems of
his own privileges and that of his emotional
difficulties. Only his ideological and political
attitudes remain to be considered.

Albert Memmi, 1965

T he Institute for Research on Public Policy has
launched a new research program on the
quality of life of Aboriginal people in Canada.
As the first step in this endeavour, this paper aims to
take stock of the current state of knowledge of the
broad issues related to the quality of life and well-
being of Aboriginal people, of innovations that are
ameliorating their living conditions and of the link-
ages between quality of life and governance in their
communities. The paper also seeks, as corollary
objectives, to identify areas where further explo-
rations might be needed and to propose new direc-
tions for policy-relevant research.

The decision to focus on the quality of life of
Aboriginal people is almost self-evident. Forty years
ago, the authors of *A Survey of the Contemporary
Indians of Canada*, also known as the Hawthorn
Report, wrote:

> It has become increasingly evident in recent
> years...that the majority of the Indian popu-
> lation constitutes a group economically
> depressed in terms of the standards that have
> become widely accepted in Canada. They are
> not sharing equally with others in proportion
> to their numbers in the material and other
> gains, satisfactions and rewards that an
> affluent and rapidly growing national econo-
> my has to offer. True enough, their level of
> material welfare, as measured simply by
> average per capita real income from all
> sources, and their level of formal education,
> are probably higher than they have ever
> been, and a minority among them have had
> successful careers in various lines of work.
> Nonetheless, in comparison to the much
> larger gains in these and other respects that
> the majority of the non-Indian population
> has enjoyed in recent decades, there are indi-
> cations that the gap between the two groups
> has been widening. (Hawthorn 1966, 1:21)

Four decades later, Indian and Northern Affairs Canada, using more sophisticated data and more refined methods of statistical analysis, echoed the Hawthorn Report: "Well-being certainly improved in First Nations between 1991 and 2001 and they did move toward equality with other Canadian communities. However, while there is nothing to suggest that First Nations will not continue to improve, the decline in their progress relative to other Canadian communities between 1996 and 2001 suggests that the well-being gap may persist" (O'Sullivan and McHardy 2004, 17).

Studies of the well-being of Aboriginal people consistently show the existence of substantial disparities between them and the general Canadian population. Analyses based on the United Nations Human Development Index (HDI), for example, have established that Canada's registered Indians,[1] including those living on and off reserves, fare considerably less well than Canadians as a whole. If status Indians were considered as a separate national entity in the UN's *Human Development Report*, they would rank about 48th (out of about 174 countries), even as Canada regularly ranks at or near the top. The situation is even less encouraging when the attention focuses on separate components of the HDI: registered Indians rank 71st on the index of educational attainment (compared with 1st for non-Aboriginal Canadians), 53rd on the life expectancy index (non-Aboriginal Canadians rank 2nd) and 42nd on real GDP per capita (non-Aboriginal Canadians are 10th) (Beavon and Cooke 2003). Despite some improvement in the well-being of registered Indians relative to non-Aboriginal Canadians over the past quarter-century, they "continue to have shorter life expectancy, lower educational attainment, and lower average annual incomes than do other Canadians, and the gap in average annual incomes actually increased during this period" (Cooke, Beavon, and McHardy 2004, 62).

This, of course, is hardly news. Forty years after the Hawthorn Report, ten years after the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples (Canada 1996) exposed the socioeconomic inequality and exclusion widely experienced by members of Aboriginal communities, after countless additional studies and, one might add, regular admonitions by the international community for Canada's failing to meet international standards of social justice and human rights when it comes to Aboriginal people,[2] policy-makers are well aware of the social and economic differences that separate Aboriginal people from other Canadians. Similarly,

they seem to have a fairly good sense of what ails Aboriginal communities and individuals: the higher incidence of family violence, youth suicide, psychological distress and substance abuse, poorer individual health, weak or undeveloped capacity for economic development, the greater likelihood of exclusion from key labour markets, substandard housing and sanitary conditions – all of which makes life for them, at least on the surface, more difficult and less appealing.

In truth, however, all is not as bleak as sensationalist news reports might imply. Recent scholarship points increasingly to successful cases of positive social and economic transformation, heartening instances of community healing and exemplary experiences of individual and collective empowerment (Ponting and Voyageur 2005; Wuttunee 2004b). Still, in the aggregate, the persistence of significant gaps between the living conditions of Canada's Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal populations (particularly those of European descent) remains a stark, undeniable reality, an unflattering blemish on Canada's purportedly enviable record of social justice.

Aboriginal people face socioeconomic challenges that, in many ways, are far more daunting than those to which the general population is usually exposed. In cities, where the majority of Aboriginal people now live, high poverty rates and low levels of educational attainment and poor health combine to exacerbate the risk of social exclusion. In remote northern communities, where significant numbers of Aboriginal people still live, access to basic services that most Canadians take for granted is often problematic, dependence on state programs for income remains high and opportunities for community-based income sources are limited (Papillon and Cosentino 2004). Whether rural or urban, many young Aboriginal individuals live in environments that inadequately prepare them for the job market. These challenges severely curtail the ability of Aboriginal people to enjoy levels of general well-being that other Canadians expect for themselves.

In such a context, questions about the quality of life and well-being of Canada's Aboriginal people have, unsurprisingly, become important priorities on the policy agenda. Since the report of the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples a decade ago, Ottawa and most provincial governments have formulated and implemented initiatives and action plans designed precisely to offer redress to and improve the living conditions and general welfare of Aboriginal communities and individuals.[3] As a result, a wide variety of expertise

and research capacity has been mobilized, both directly and indirectly, across several fields of the social sciences, the humanities and the life sciences, to examine the many issues related to the quality of life and well-being of Aboriginal people in Canada.

Yet, despite the impressive amount of knowledge accumulated so far about the nature of the problems and the challenges, about the conditions for success and positive change and about which policy solutions work and which do not, the policy community is still wrestling with the unrelenting persistence of appreciable socioeconomic disparities between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people. Have the right questions been posed? Have all the issues been looked at? Have all the policy implications been examined? Has every angle of analysis been considered? Have the appropriate policies been proposed? In the following pages, I address these questions as I evaluate current knowledge about Aboriginal quality of life and ponder alternative research orientations. To this end, the second, core section of the paper offers a synthesis that identifies and reviews critically what appear to be the main approaches that characterize the literature, the set of knowledge that obtains and the analytical or epistemological underpinnings that inform each approach.

Before looking at these approaches in turn, however, I first consider the notion of "quality of life" and the related concept of "well-being." Although one might think *a priori* that the fundamental meanings of these terms are fairly straightforward – simply, one is happy, secure and comfortable or one is not – they are, in fact, the object of varied and sometimes contested definitions and understandings. These different interpretations need to be grasped, however, for they inform and influence the literature on the quality of life of Aboriginal people in different ways. The final section of the paper weaves the threads of the literature review into a critical discussion of the scope and limitations of the current research, and suggests on that basis possible directions for a renewed research agenda.

Quality of Life: What's in a Name?

Taken in and of itself, the idea of quality of life can be quite subjective and its meaning rather relative: the criteria and conditions that underlie one's general sense of well-being, of physical comfort and mental wellness and of satisfaction with one's life vary from person to person, culture to culture and

society to society. Substantial efforts have been made in recent years across the social and life sciences to strip the term of its relativistic nature so as to make it less approximate, more tangible and, ultimately, more measurable and more reliable as an indicator and predictor of individual and social development. Much of what passes as research on quality of life focuses on well-being. The two terms are often conflated intellectually and seem to appear as synonyms for each other. Although a fairly elaborate "science of well-being" has developed in recent years (see Huppert and Baylis 2004), what specialists discuss in the end are the constituent elements, both for individuals and communities, of the good life and the dimensions that should be emphasized when looking for acceptable standards of evaluating it. On that score, views are quite varied.

In a background document prepared for Canadian Policy Research Networks (CPRN), Andrew Sharpe surveys no fewer than 11 indices of economic and social well-being and two sets of social indicators most often used in Canada and around the world (Sharpe 2000).[4] Despite methodological differences and purposes, most of these indices (and others Sharpe does not review[5]) share a particularly strong emphasis on diverse aspects of material well-being, such as income (or wages), personal consumption, household facilities, government spending, financial wealth, educational attainment, debt, unemployment and vulnerability to labour market fluctuations, income distribution, poverty, educational attainment, life expectancy and stocks of wealth (natural resources, human capital, real capital stock). A few indices go beyond material considerations and focus their assessment of the quality of life of a society or community on whether some key desirable human values are being fulfilled: harmony with the environment, affective autonomy, intellectual autonomy, respect for and preservation of life, socioeconomic equality and the absence of social hierarchies.

Notwithstanding conceptual differences in the way these indexes are conceived and constructed, they are informed by an implicit understanding of quality of life that broadly includes market incomes, non-market care and support within the family, state-sponsored services and income transfers and community services and support. Although it is not necessarily clearly acknowledged or formulated in this way, quality of life hinges in part on what the state can or cannot or will or will not offer citizens, or on whether or not the state shields them from market inadequacies. It is a function of the guarantees that the state provides citizens that basic necessities will be covered and that protection from

physical or material risks and psychological distress will be available. From that perspective, quality of life is ultimately determined and assessed in large part by the ability of the state to cope with broad economic, demographic, political and social trends and to adjust to the demands posed by their evolution.

This perspective was largely confirmed in a survey conducted by CPRN in 2000 that was designed by citizens to capture what they believe contributes to quality of life. Citizens from a cross-section of Canadian society were brought together in 40 small groups in various locations across the country to discuss what is important for quality of life and the information they need to assess progress (Michalski 2001, 2002; Zagon 2001, 2002). CPRN found that, when asked directly what matters to them in terms of quality of life, Canadians alluded to dimensions that can be grouped under nine thematic headings: democratic rights and participation, health care, education and learning, the environment, social programs and conditions, community, personal well-being, the economy and employment and, lastly, government. The survey does not really reflect the views of Canadians about the presence of the state in their lives but, for nearly all of the themes it explores, state functions do have a direct and determining bearing on the way they are actualized on the ground. The impression that clearly emanates from the CPRN survey is that the state invariably plays a fundamental and inherent role in providing the constituent elements of the good life. The survey also implies, by extension, that any policy analysis or research on the quality of life should focus on the state's measurable capacity to create the conditions for the good life. Similarly, policy prescriptions about quality of life should indicate the intensity of state action that is needed to bring about a satisfactory level of the good life.

In other strands of the literature, quality of life and well-being are not associated to the same extent with the state's role; some do not even consider it a pertinent factor. Their focus is more on the capacity of individuals and narrowly defined communities to create their own conditions of the good life. John Helliwell and Robert Putnam, for example, draw a direct link between well-being and social capital (Helliwell 2005; Helliwell and Putnam 2004). Building on Putnam's own influential empirical and theoretical work on social capital (Putnam 2000) as well as on data banks such as the World Values Survey and the European Values Survey, they make the case that the sense of well-being and the impression that one is

experiencing the good life are largely connected to the social context in which individuals find themselves. In their view, improving levels of income and general affluence is not necessarily conducive to measurable increases in subjective well-being; rather, well-being is strongly related to social connectedness (marriage, family and workplace ties, civic engagement) and to the dependability of others and the degree to which they are trusted. Society-wide increases in social capital (and, implicitly, in social cohesion) are thus more likely to have a strongly positive effect on well-being and the general quality of life. The policy implications are clear: the more social capital is produced, the better life in a given society or community will be. Individuals can foster the development of such capital out of their own initiatives, or they can summon the state and ensure that the delivery of its programs will favour a greater degree of social capital. Communities that succeed in building and maintaining greater social cohesion and in facilitating personal empowerment and integration into the mainstream will improve their quality of life.

The state as a factor in quality of life hardly figures at all in approaches that emphasize psychological or emotional criteria as benchmarks of well-being and that are often conceived with therapeutic purposes in mind. While they might agree that state-guaranteed access to the means of economic security and social context are not without importance in assessing quality of life, they stress instead what some insist is a holistic understanding of quality of life and well-being, in which all dimensions of life must be taken equally into account. Personal healing and the process of reclaiming control over one's personal life are key aspects of the approach of such studies (see Dossa 1989; Huppert and Baylis 2004).

Since 1994, the University of Toronto's Quality of Life Research Unit has been studying the quality of life of adults with physical or psychiatric disabilities and children with developmental disabilities, as well as elderly people, teenagers and adults in the general population. In so doing, it has developed a conceptual framework that defines quality of life as "the degree to which a person enjoys the important possibilities of his or her life," whereby "possibilities result from the opportunities and limitations each person has in his/her life and reflect the interaction of personal and environmental factors." In this framework, "enjoyment has two components: the experience of satisfaction or the possession or achievement of some characteristic."[6] The framework is centred on three life domains, each of

which comprises three subdomains: *being* (physical being, psychological being, spiritual being), which refers to who one is; *belonging* (physical belonging, social belonging, community belonging), which entails one's connections with environments; and *becoming* (practical becoming, leisure becoming, growth becoming). In its empirical, evaluative application, the framework is constructed so as to be sensitive to the specific life situations of individuals and to take into account that each person might attach a different importance to each particular dimension of life and enjoy it with different intensity. In addition, it controls for the power of individuals to make their own decisions to change any aspect of their life situation. Thus, an environment that ensures a person can experience a life of quality is one that "provides for basic needs to be met (food, shelter, safety, social contact)[;] provides for a range of opportunities within the individual's potential[; and] provides for control and choice within that environment."

Global and integrated conceptions of quality of life and well-being are strongly emphasized by a number of Aboriginal scholars. However, they see holistic approaches not so much as a methodological tool of evaluation but as inherent in the Aboriginal world view, which holds the good life, first and foremost, to be one free of chaos and disorder. As Native American historian and philosopher Donald Fixico explains, "chaos is frustration in life, anxiety, and disappointment"; the disorder that ensues "leads to fear, distrust, and, ultimately, to self-destruction." To counteract the negativity of these "evil twins," it is important to achieve "balance in oneself and in one's community," for without it "life is more difficult and alarming." As Fixico explains,

> Balance is between two things or more and it is the purpose in life for American Indians whose philosophy is inclusive of all things in the universe. At least five kinds of balance exist: (1) balance within one's self, (2) balance within the family, (3) balance within the community or tribe, (4) balance with external communities, including other tribes and the spiritual world, and (5) balance with the environment and the universe. (2003, 49)

The idea of balance, in fact, undergirds the notion, central to Aboriginal scholarship on quality of life and well-being, that everything is related to everything, that nothing can happen to one part of an individual's or community's life without affecting all the other parts — that to enjoy a life of good quality, it is essential that every aspect of life be at peace and properly attended to, perfectly attuned to all other aspects. Living well and healthily requires harmony

within one's inner life, one's relationships and one's physical and social environment.

It is not uncommon for Aboriginal scholars to address or explain quality-of-life and well-being issues through references to the concept of the medicine wheel,[7] an ancient symbol, a circle, which represents a way of seeing and knowing as well as the teachings that go with it. The wheel is divided into four parts and is used to show how, within whatever entity one might consider (a person, a family, a community), these four parts and their constituent dimensions are interrelated and interdependent. The good life reflects the proper functioning of each part and their continued interconnectedness. Applied to individuals, the medicine wheel encompasses the dynamic system of mind, body, emotions and spirit, and the particular needs of each of these areas of the wheel that must be met for the development of human potential. With respect to the family, the quadrants of the medicine wheel include the dominant thinking patterns that inform and drive decision-making and influence the family's relationships with the outside world; human relations, which refer to the nature and quality of intercourse of the members of the family with each other; the material economy, which has to do with how the family provides for its physical needs; and cultural and spiritual life — the beliefs, values, morals and goals of the family. Finally, insofar as the wider community is concerned, the medicine wheel incorporates the political and administrative environment, where the quality and effectiveness of people's participation and decision-making power in matters that directly affect their lives are indicators of the good life; the social environment, where society-wide patterns of human interactions are defined and where a measure of the good life would be the community's openness to and support of individuals and groups working toward positive social change; the economic environment, where the development and maintenance of long-term, sustainable systems of production that empower individuals, preserve the environment and contribute to community capacity are objectives meant to ensure a good quality of life; and the cultural and spiritual environment, where the presence of a respectful dialogue on values and an appreciation for diversity are important indicators of well-being (Four Worlds International Institute n.d., part 1).

As this brief overview indicates, ways of understanding and assessing quality of life and well-being are diverse. Although the intellectual or methodological distance between some of them may not be substantial, they do inform studies of Aboriginal quality of life in

different ways. As the review of the literature in the next section shows, the decision to zero in on one or another issue related to quality of life, or to favour one type of policy solution rather than another, is largely related to the manner in which one perceives quality of life and undertakes to address it.

Aboriginal Quality of Life: Reviewing the Research

Four major approaches shape the relevant Canadian literature on Aboriginal quality of life.[8] They are not necessarily tightly defined or mutually exclusive. Authors one might readily identify with one approach may also have some analytical, epistemological or methodological affinity with another. Still, they are sufficiently distinct from each other to warrant a separate classification. Their distinctiveness is a matter of emphasis or focus.

The first approach tends to focus primarily — usually in quantitative terms — on the socioeconomic problems and issues Aboriginal people face without, however, explicitly prescribing precise policy directions. The other three approaches, on the contrary, build on existing factual knowledge and data about Aboriginal people to suggest various policy stances to improve Aboriginal well-being or alternative ways to understand the stakes of Aboriginal quality-of-life issues. The second approach insists on capacity-building, community development and economic empowerment, and is inclined to draw — most often explicitly, but sometimes only implicitly — on the theoretical literature on social capital and social cohesion. The third approach explores research that seeks to develop strategies and paths to community and personal healing as preconditions to well-being and a better quality of life; it generally stresses individual or psychological reconstruction and personal transformation. Finally, the fourth approach stems from a normative critique of current government policies concerning Aboriginal people that is grounded in the search for policy alternatives that focus more on fiscal responsibility, accountability and the efficiency of service delivery.

Facts, figures and the imperatives of the state

The close call of the 1995 Quebec referendum on sovereignty was a reality check for those whose business it is to keep the Canadian political community one,

undivided and socially cohesive. Quebec's particular demands and threats of leaving the federation, however, were symptomatic of something deeper and broader in its implications. Like Quebecers, more and more groups and constituencies were dissatisfied with one aspect or another of the normative matrix that defines the Canadian political community, or had issues with the governance system employed to render that matrix operational.[9] Aboriginal people, vindicated and bolstered in their claims by the report of the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples, were not the least among them. This context clearly raised the concern of policy-makers, who felt something had to be done to shore up Canada's withering social cohesion and strengthen the value of its citizenship.[10]

Over the past decade, the federal government has deployed an impressive network of state and university researchers to document and analyze the situation of Aboriginal people in Canada and to suggest policy directions. Data from Statistics Canada have become more extensive as a result of major new initiatives such as the 2001 Aboriginal Peoples Survey (O'Donnell and Tait 2004; Siggner and Costa 2005). In addition, the federal government has collaborated with members of the research community in a broad, still ongoing fact-finding, data-gathering and problem-solving endeavour on a wide range of social and economic issues that are perceived as potential threats to the well-being of Canadians and to the general cohesion of Canadian society. Aboriginal people have figured fairly prominently in this endeavour, in part, of course, because of the state's commitment, in *Gathering Strength: Canada's Aboriginal Action Plan* (Canada 1997), to create favourable conditions for the improvement of all dimensions of their general well-being and for their increased participation in Canadian society; but in part also because of the considerable place that issues related to Aboriginal people have come to occupy in public discourse and the policy agenda.[11]

In recent years, the state-research community nexus has yielded a fairly substantial amount of up-to-date information on the social and economic situation of Aboriginal people. One successful and high-profile example of this association is the First Nations Cohesion Project, carried out jointly by researchers from the Department of Sociology at the University of Western Ontario and the Strategic Research and Analysis Directorate of Indian and Northern Affairs Canada. Established in 1999 with the financial support of the Social Sciences and

Humanities Research Council of Canada, this particular research initiative has led, among other things, to two major Aboriginal research policy conferences, in 2002 and 2006, with hundreds of participants from government, academic circles and Aboriginal organizations. The contributions to the 2002 conference (Newhouse and Peters 2003; White, Maxim, and Beavon 2003, 2004) provide an impressive compendium of mostly quantitative data and statistical observations on the full range of quality-of-life issues; they represent well the analytical and epistemological spirit with which a policy-driven, evidence-based perspective frames the question of Aboriginal quality of life.

The research agenda that informs the whole enterprise is mainly focused on documenting the social problems and realities that characterize Aboriginal communities in order to get as precise as possible a picture of the situation and to determine on that basis the best course of policy action for the state. Surprisingly, most of the research within that framework is rather short on policy solutions. The bulk of the work produced so far rests on positivist methodologies and hinges essentially on the search for reliable factual data and measurable social and economic outcomes. Though not all are necessarily statistics driven, many of the studies in the First Nations Cohesion Project assess the quality of life of Aboriginal people in rural and urban settings for the most part through the prism of statistical evidence on health and life expectancy, educational attainment, income distribution, employment status and labour market participation, economic development, demographic estimates and projections, geographical mobility and urban migrations, language retention, criminality, sexual offence and family violence. Space does not permit one to review all 52 contributions but, notwithstanding the occasional success story of healing and reconstruction, they tend to confirm the picture of social distress, community dysfunction, economic marginalization and cultural erosion that is well known to anyone familiar with the contemporary social and economic reality of Aboriginal people in Canada.

The studies contrasting Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal levels of well-being alluded to in the introduction emanate from the First Nations Cohesion Project; they capture remarkably well the gist of the difficult socioeconomic challenges with which Aboriginal people are confronted. One cannot help but be struck in particular by the poor aggregate performance of Aboriginal populations relative to non-Aboriginal people on all key indicators of the United Nations Human Development Index revealed by those studies. On an epistemological level, though, they are also a significant illustration of the analytical perspective that pervades the First Nations Cohesion Project's evaluation of Aboriginal quality of life. Despite the insistence of the principal investigators that their research program is meant to de-emphasize the victimization model within which Aboriginal issues are often framed, the findings are cast against Western and Eurocentric benchmarks of socioeconomic accomplishment. The whole research approach is designed, in fact, so as to stress the socioeconomic distance between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people and the capacity deficit of Aboriginal communities. The intent, of course, is to inform and alert the state to what appears to the democratic mind as an unacceptable situation of social inequity, and to suggest corrective paths likely to facilitate the adaptation of Aboriginal people to market imperatives, to reactivate social cohesion, and, it is hoped, soon to close the socioeconomic gap between Aboriginal people and the rest of the Canadian population. In reality, the research agenda and analytical perspective that inform the First Nations Cohesion Project partake of a long tradition of state-driven research on Aboriginal people in Canada, which is essentially determined by state concern for effective Aboriginal policy management.

In his account of the Canadian state's management of Indian welfare policy from 1873 to 1965, Hugh Shewell shows how social scientists were called upon by Indian Affairs in the early years of the postwar period to shed light on the various aspects of Aboriginal social behaviour, psychological dispositions and their economic situation so as to devise policies and programs that could promote the full integration of Aboriginal people into Canadian society. As he argues:

> Throughout the 1950s, studies conducted for Indian Affairs centred on problems of Indian adaptation and transition to Euro-Canadian society. They were tailored to the state's needs rather than to a sympathetic appreciation of the situation facing First Nations. Most professed to be objective studies, but nearly all were implicitly biased toward ideas of liberal progress, modern society, and what Indians lacked — either in their social environment or in their nature — that would enable them to become successful citizens. (Shewell 2004, 219)

Fifty years later, the assimilationist proclivity of the Canadian state's preoccupation with Aboriginal people arguably has been considerably diluted, and it would be unthinkable today not to profess, officially at least, sympathy for the difficulties afflicting Aboriginal communities. In epistemological terms, however, little has

changed. The state-research community nexus is still premised on the state's belief in the superiority of scientific rationality and empirical evidence to guide its policy vis-à-vis Aboriginal people; it is still initiated to help the state shape its own policy orientations. Aboriginal people are still seen as a policy issue, and the particularities of their socioeconomic reality are treated as social problems to be addressed and resolved. In the process, Aboriginal people continue to be framed analytically as objects of study, not as knowing subjects, despite the declared willingness of state researchers to include them as partners and equals in research designs.[12]

Today's state-research community nexus is not as overtly biased toward ideas of liberal progress as was the case with previous generations of policy-makers, and its members are usually quite careful not to sound off about the supposed superiority of Western and Euro-Canadian ways. Still, their concern with the quality of life of Aboriginal people is couched essentially in terms that posit Eurocentric notions of well-being as ultimate objectives. Furthermore, the state's current focus on measurable dimensions of Aboriginal quality of life is in fact largely predicated on its neoliberal commitment to individual equality and universalistic values, which translates into complex, uneasily decipherable and, at some level, hardly admissible motivations. Proclaiming that Aboriginal people must have access to the same degree of well-being as every other Canadian citizen is also implying, particularly in Canada's policy context of fiscal attrition, that they must eventually do as well in the market as mainstream Canadians; ultimately, they must come to rely less on the state for their individual and collective well-being.

Similarly, despite officially acknowledging and embracing diversity and cultural differences, the Canadian state also works to minimize the potentially divisive nature of cultural and identity claims. Indeed, it actually favours the merger of differences into one preestablished, normative and cultural framework whose parameters reflect the hegemonic position of groups and individuals whose socio-political preeminence in the country's history seems to justify their dominance (Abu-Laban and Gabriel 2002; Bannerji 2000; Labelle and Salée 1999). As cultural theorist Homi Bhabha put it,

> although there is always an entertainment and encouragement of cultural diversity, there is always also a corresponding containment of it. A transparent norm is constituted, a norm given by the host society or domi-
> nant culture which says that "these cultures are fine, but we must be able to locate them within our own grid."...[T]he universalism that paradoxically permits diversity masks ethnocentric norms, values and interests. (1990, 208)

One might object that there is nothing inherently wrong with that: should it actually be the case, it takes nothing away from the intrinsic value and usefulness of the statistical evidence and empirical observations that state-driven research on Aboriginal people has generated. Be that as it may, it is important to note that, in the end, the research output and any understanding of Aboriginal quality-of-life issues one might derive from it are unavoidably fraught with the ideological requirements and normative templates that the Canadian state and the groups or interests shaping its policy agenda impose on Canadian society; as is well known, the political significance of Aboriginal influence in this process has tended to be rather marginal. Ultimately, the most important limitation of the state-research community nexus is that it refrains from questioning, let alone modifying, the societal paradigm that has allowed the disadvantageous socioeconomic conditions of Aboriginal people to develop in the first place. "[O]ur purpose here," acknowledges one of the principal investigators of the First Nations Cohesion Project, "is to advance the research-policy nexus, not dramatically shift paradigmatic perceptions" (White 2003, xxiii).

One could argue that this is an epistemological choice — and by extension a political one as well — that is as legitimate and justifiable as any. However, the fundamentally uncritical nature of this choice excludes the systemic and political constraints that actually restrict the development of a truly transformative quality-of-life agenda for Aboriginal people in Canada today. One still remains largely unclear as to the reasons and the long-term historical processes that have shaped things the way they are. Although the evidence-based perspective favoured by the First Nations Cohesion Project does undoubtedly yield a more precise and more statistically refined picture of the socioeconomic condition of Aboriginal people than was available merely a decade ago, analytically it does not venture much beyond the need to take stock. While one gets from it a good sense of where things stand, the approach does not really offer in the end an explicit vision of the policy direction that would best tackle the most pressing quality-of-life issues faced by Aboriginal people in Canada.

Social cohesion, social capital and capacity-building

The will to build a research agenda focused on shedding empirical and statistical light on the present socioeconomic situation of Aboriginal people rests on a relatively simple thought process. It begins with two central, unquestioned presuppositions: first, that a healthy level of social cohesion is a precondition of well-being and good quality of life for both individuals and communities; second, that Aboriginal individuals and communities in Canada are suffering from significant disruptions in their inner social balance, from a breakdown in social cohesion. The report of the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples compellingly underscored that reality. The commission also emphasized the role and impact of colonialism in this breakdown, but since the past cannot be changed – so continues the thought process – it makes more sense to document and understand the obstacles to improved social cohesion as they appear now, and to work from there.

Among those who endorse the general premise of this intellectual project, some have chosen to uncover the empirical conditions of Aboriginal life (the self-imposed mission of several contributors to the First Nations Cohesion Project). Others, building on available data, concern themselves with the best way to reconstitute or foster enhanced social cohesion within Aboriginal communities without its becoming a threat to Canada's own global social cohesion. The latter group's research contributions have spawned a fairly extensive, increasingly dominant literature that emphasizes social capital and capacity-building as foundations for a better quality of life in the following way. In order to bring about the social cohesion that is the key to improved well-being, Aboriginal people must acquire greater capacity – that is, "the ability of individuals, organizations, and whole societies to define and solve problems, make informed choices, order their priorities and plan their futures, as well as implement programs and projects to sustain them" (Nair 2003, 1, quoted in Hunt 2005, 1). While access to skilled human resources and physical capital is a definite asset in the process of capacity-building, the presence of a substantial pool of social capital is essential to its actualization.

The notion of social capital is central. A product of sociological theory (see Bourdieu 1986, 1993; Coleman 1988; Portes 1998), it has at times been severely criticized (see Baron, Field, and Schuller 2000; Fine 2001) but has become a mainstay of research agendas, both explicitly and implicitly, in mainstream social and policy sciences for nearly two decades. It has been conceptualized in a number of different ways, and for that reason it does not easily lend itself to one straightforward and clear-cut definition (Hunter 2004; Woolcock 2001). Nevertheless, there seems to be some agreement that social capital can be broadly understood as

> networks of social relations which are characterised by norms of trust and reciprocity and which lead to mutually beneficial outcomes...For individuals, this can mean access to social connections that help the processes of getting by or getting ahead. For communities, social capital reflects the ability of community members to participate, cooperate, and interact. (Hunter 2004, 3)

Although less tangible than human and physical capitals, social capital manifests itself through participation in (civic) organizations, the construction of trust and trustworthiness and the development of norms of co-operative behaviour and reciprocal obligations (White and Maxim 2003, 14). It plays a pivotal role in bringing to fruition any investment in human or physical capital: without the social vitality that high levels of social capital entail the economic viability of a community inevitably will decrease (Chataway 2002, 78). Simply put, "[t]he more people are engaged together in a variety of associations, from singing groups to informal loan cooperatives, the higher the level of generalized trust and cooperative problem-solving in the system and the greater the strength and productivity of that community" (77). As this belief permeates much of the social capital literature, research tends to focus "on the positive outcomes associated with high levels of social capital and [seeks] to explain social problems as an outcome of diminishing social capital stock" (Hunter 2004, 12).

The notion of social capital currently has tremendous intellectual purchase in the scholarship on Aboriginal quality of life. Even in works that do not readily identify it as a guiding concept, one can often detect in the subtext that the presence or absence of social capital is considered a determining factor in the success or failure of an Aboriginal community. There now seems to be a fairly wide – though not quite general – consensus within the research and policy community that the significant erosion of social capital brought on by various state policies, cultural disintegration, displacement and the wearing down of traditional knowledge is largely responsible for the difficulties many Aboriginal communities and individuals experience. To address this problem and reverse the negative dynamics of socioeconomic ills, specialists

suggest that measures be devised to replenish the depleted stocks of social capital and develop capacity. It is not always entirely clear which comes first, but both social capital and capacity-building appear intimately intertwined in most of the literature: without good social capital – that is, without strong social bonds and networks, without trust and reciprocity and without transmission and the concomitant acceptance of dominant cultural and social norms – it will be difficult to build capacity because the appropriate social conditions to maintain that capacity will be lacking; conversely, without developing some form of enabling framework and mechanisms of empowerment, whatever social capital might still exist is likely to erode further and disappear.

Regardless of the angle from which one approaches the question, most scholars and policy specialists agree that the quality of life and well-being of Aboriginal communities and individuals in Canada will improve if they are properly empowered and provided with opportunities to reclaim control over their lives and sociocultural assets – if, in other words, they can reestablish social cohesion. As a result, the literature that derives from the social capital/capacity-building perspective is mainly concerned with the conditions of Aboriginal empowerment and the desirable path to it. However, while almost everyone seems to agree on the ultimate goal, the design of the road map to get there varies from one author to another.

The authors of a discussion paper for Canadian Policy Research Networks (CPRN) on the reconfiguration of Canada's social architecture consider and compare the policy challenges for the provision of welfare services to Aboriginal people in the United States, Australia and New Zealand and conclude that

> what is needed [in Canada] is support aimed towards *building Aboriginal institutional capacity*, in communities or in urban centres. This support for autonomous capacity building, to consolidate the legitimacy and efficiency of Aboriginal governing authorities, is essential for creating an environment conducive to socio-economic development and strengthening the welfare of Aboriginal peoples over the long term. The best social policies may well have limited impact without such a broader perspective. (Papillon and Cosentino 2004, 20; italics in original)

The authors of that paper do not discuss just what degree of autonomy should be granted in the capacity-building process, but this issue is the object of divergent views and differences in focus within the literature. CPRN, for one, links Aboriginal capacity-building to the Canadian state's existing institutional apparatus and intervention in the process. In another CPRN discussion paper, Katherine Graham and Evelyn Peters (2002) call for the federal government to exercise a "central leadership role" in dealing with the urban Aboriginal agenda, as they believe it can play a constructive role in supporting Aboriginal organizations working in cities, Aboriginal initiatives in community economic development and housing and educational needs. In still another CPRN report, Frances Abele (2004) argues that, despite the persistence of some of its historically discriminatory practices, the Canadian state has mended its ways since the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples and has embarked on a number of capacity-developing initiatives in concert with Aboriginal organizations and governments. Abele's review of past and emergent practices of social provision implies that a new institutional framework can be put in place within the structural parameters of the Canadian state to ameliorate the conditions of life of Aboriginal people. Although her perspective privileges the creation of partnerships between all levels of government, including Aboriginal governments, it does not link capacity with self-government or the development of a fully politically autonomous and self-determined institutional sphere for Aboriginal people: whatever new capacity Aboriginal people need to acquire, it should be circumscribed by the institutional environment of the Canadian state.

Abele's view on building Aboriginal capacity echoes, in fact, the spirit behind a number of capacity-development initiatives put in place by the federal government since the late 1990s,[11] but falls short of the comprehensive approach promoted by the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples. The commission essentially limited the role of the Canadian state to financing services and the costs of self-government. It envisioned Aboriginal nations' having a much greater say and involvement in building capacity, and advocated a four-stage transition strategy toward fully functional Aboriginal governments: rebuilding Aboriginal nations and reclaiming nationhood; designing and planning national governments and reflecting these in a constitution or in law; negotiating new intergovernmental agreements with other governments in Canada; and exercising the whole panoply of governmental powers over the long term. The realization of this latter stage would complete the transition, but would imply the development of a properly educated human resource base, skilled in the requisites of self-government, culturally sensitive and

in tune with the self-determination objectives of Aboriginal governments; it would also imply the establishment of accountability, data collection and information management systems, as well as adequate organizational and institutional structures capable of sustaining the activities of Aboriginal governments (Institute on Governance n.d.).

Other discussions of capacity-building in the literature tend to steer clear of considerations of the role of the Canadian state. Instead, they approach the matter in relation to the inner workings and societal logic of local Aboriginal communities − a position that, interestingly, is somewhat at odds with the recommendations of the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples, which emphasized national structures of empowerment rather than community-based ones. Illustrations of this stance abound in the pages of the *Journal of Aboriginal Economic Development*, a scholarly journal published twice yearly since 1999 by the Council for the Advancement of Native Development Officers (CANDO)[14] under the intellectual leadership of well-respected Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal researchers and academics in the areas of economic development, business management, community studies and Native studies.[15] The overall perspective running through most of the contributions to the journal is generally quite positive. Scholarship and analysis are devoted both to documenting successful cases of community economic development initiatives that led to tangible empowerment and positive social transformation at the local level, and to drawing out the theoretical and methodological implications that can inform action and help economic field workers develop adequate and adapted tools for capacity-building in their own environment. The journal's implicit objective is to move away from the logic of victimization extant in the general literature on Aboriginal people and instill in Aboriginal communities an attitude of confidence in their ability to take charge of their future in accord with their own values and self-determined goals of well-being (Newhouse 2001, 2004; Wuttunee 2004a).

Within this strand of the literature, economic development obviously figures as a significant vector of capacity-building. There are, however, some analytical and interpretative variations as to what the ingredients of economic success for increased capacity are and how economic success should actually be understood. US researchers Stephen Cornell and Joseph Kalt suggest, on the basis of research conducted within the Harvard Project on American Indian Economic Development since the late 1980s, that successful economic development in Aboriginal communities depends less on what assets they have in hand than on how they are organized, how they make decisions and how they govern themselves. Cornell and Kalt find that sovereignty, institutions and culture matter in achieving economic success. They argue that, when Aboriginal communities make their own decisions about what approaches to take and what resources to develop, they consistently outperform non-Aboriginal decision-makers. Similarly, stable political institutions and policies, fair and independent mechanisms for dispute resolution, a separation of politics from day-to-day business management, a capable bureaucracy and a strategic orientation contribute to the maintenance of an environment conducive to economic development. Finally, they also contend that culture plays a significant role, as the economic success of Aboriginal communities rests on a strong and widely accepted fit between the culture of the community and the structure and powers of the governing institutions (Cornell and Kalt 1992, 1998, 2000; see also the Harvard Project Web site, www.ksg.harvard.edu/hpaied).

The work of the Harvard Project researchers has had much influence within Aboriginal circles in Canada, having inspired the advocacy efforts and sociopolitical vision of many Aboriginal leaders. The chapter on economic development in the report of the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples (Canada 1996, vol. 2, chap. 5) bears its mark in part, while CANDO officials regularly refer to it approvingly and several chiefs across the country have sought the advice of Cornell and Kalt or espoused their perspective. Clearly, the Harvard Project's emphasis on independent governance and the importance of culturally appropriate governing institutions lends support to the claims of self-determination and nationhood that are now the mainstay of Aboriginal political discourse.

Cornell and Kalt's underlying assumptions and conclusions, however, are not without detractors. One critic finds fault with their empirical findings, the unexceptional and self-evident nature of their conclusions, their uncritical endorsement of capitalist management principles and economic rationalism and their inability to factor in class, gender and race issues (Mowbray 2005). "The Harvard model," writes Christina Dowling, "embraces western style economics, underpinned by an individualistic orientation and acceptance of authority based on self-interest. Cornell and Kalt tend to use uncritically concepts such as market enterprises, and westernized notions of economic development; they

lament the lack of economic success of those tribes whose cultures do not easily welcome the business model" (Dowling 2005, 120). In the end, she argues, the Harvard Project proffers a vision of Aboriginal economic development unsuitable for most Aboriginal communities and only reinforces the attempts of the state to tone down their otherness.

Aboriginal scholars Wanda Wuttunee and David Newhouse have proposed, each in her or his own voice, a way of conceiving capacity and economic empowerment that contrasts with the institutional, nation-building, rationalist and market-efficiency focus of the Harvard Project. Without rejecting the capitalist imperatives that unavoiᵈly underscore economic development, they sug̱ ꞏ instead that these imperatives be adapted to Aboriginal world views – that Aboriginal values and normative parameters be made to inform any process of economic and social empowerment.

In her latest book, Wuttunee (2004b) borrows from the development model put forward by the US-based First Nations Development Institute and directly inspired by the medicine wheel (Salway Black 1994). In her view, the holistic approach and spirit upon which the medicine wheel is based are more appropriate not only to understand Aboriginal communities and their needs, but also as a framework with which to guide action toward economic and social empowerment. As she notes:

> most programs for Aboriginal peoples encourage them to enter the very market-based, capitalist system that has marginalized many of them for years...This alternative approach, however, strives for a balance and additional terms of reference that may be picked up by anyone and used to modify their approaches to development. Relationships between people, communities and environment with a spiritual underpinning are honoured and are the focus for economic development within a context of values, culture and tradition. Many of these factors were labelled as problems in the regular approach to business and economic development. Now they form the basis for success. (Wuttunee 2004b, 24)

Wuttunee's message is simple: Aboriginal people must use their own ways of looking at the world and at their communities, based on their needs. They may draw on capitalism, but they must be left to do things according to their own understanding of how those should be done. When they are – that is, "when they are able to make consistent input into the decision-making process" – she believes her research shows that "the checks and balance in the system will tend to fac-

tor protection of the Earth Mother into the final decision...[T]he guiding principle is reasonable development in support of livelihood and community" (185).

Wuttunee's optimism notwithstanding, the compatibility of traditional Aboriginal values with capitalism is not easily achieved. Newhouse (2004) is all too aware of it, but, like Wuttunee, he believes that what he calls "red capitalism" is possible and that Aboriginal values and world views can be constructively applied to the practices of capitalism for the betterment of the quality of life in Aboriginal communities. According to Newhouse, "capitalism with a red face" can have a positive, transformative impact on both the life of Aboriginal communities and the broader society, in several ways:

- the concept of personal and social development will be much broader, encompassing all the dimensions of life included in the medicine wheel;
- development will be seen as a process, not a product – a journey, not an end in itself, with long-term results taking precedence over short-term gains;
- red capitalism will bring development to be seen as a joint effort between the individual and the collective and its institutions, as a collaborative rather than a competitive process;
- similarly, red capitalism will also be seen as a partnership between the individual and the world in such a way that, when individuals see themselves as part of the creation, they are more likely to make respectful choices in their development projects and the technology they employ;
- the emphasis will be on human capital investment rather than on individual capital accumulation;
- elders' traditional wisdom will be used to guide planning and decision-making;
- wealth distribution will reflect Aboriginal values of kindness and sharing, thus modifying the capitalist notion of success in material terms;
- the establishment of Western economic institutions will have to be attuned to the needs and values of the community;
- decision-making by consensus will guide the development of the community and the organizational structures needed to support it; and
- notions of honesty and respect, so central to the Aboriginal value set, will foster a heightened sense of accountability for economic institutions and decision-makers (Newhouse 2000, 59-60).

It is important to note that, contrary to the Harvard Project, which invites Aboriginal communities to follow well-delineated paths to and proven

recipes of economic success and empowerment, Wuttunee and Newhouse are not prescriptive. Their evocation of Aboriginal traditions and philosophies is essentially suggestive – a guideline, not an absolute prerequisite. As long as a community is comfortable with the choices it makes, as long as those choices are supported by a large consensus and meet its needs, how its goals and priorities are reached is not of central concern in the end. Whether a community decides to adhere to unadulterated principles of market capitalism or renounce them, whether it chooses to enter into partnerships with external, private or public economic agents or act alone, or again whether it works within the institutional and structural limits of the state or creates its own is relatively immaterial. The litmus test appears to be whether the chosen path has ultimately enabled the community, improved its living conditions and empowered its members in a way that respects the physical environment and the community's cultural norms.

Development thinking and practice can be divided into two major strands: "One...stresses the need for sound policies (especially efficient markets) to sustain growth, coupled with sound financial and legal institutions to foster investment and trade. The other focuses more on investment in human and social capital, and the strengthening of civil society" (Hunt 2005, 1). In the Canadian capacity and development literature relevant to Aboriginal people, this distinction is blurred. It is not that it is nonexistent, but it is not uncommon for writers and practitioners in the field of Aboriginal community development to find merit in whatever approach seems to work in any given instance, even if it happens to be one to which they may not be immediately drawn. In a way, one might find that refreshing, for, on the face of it, it seems to evince both an encouraging absence of intellectual rigidity and heartening postcolonial sensitivity to the diversity of situations experienced by Aboriginal people in Canada. Wuttunee claims that her review of economic development initiatives in Aboriginal communities of western Canada shows that "there are no cookie-cutter solutions...no panaceas" (2004b, 17). Similarly, Dowling insists on the "multivocality" of Aboriginal communities and on the importance of factoring it into any development or capacity initiative (2005, 126).

Overall, notwithstanding the variations reviewed here, the literature on social cohesion, social capital and capacity-building rests on the firm belief that the social and economic strengthening of communities is the key to greater measures of well-being for Aboriginal people. This belief is now deeply entrenched in policy circles and informs much of the thinking and action of both governments and Aboriginal organizations. Communities, however, are made up of individuals, and many consider that the health and well-being of communities largely depend on the preponderance of physically healthy, mentally sound and well-functioning individuals in their midst. Without downplaying the importance of community, they stress instead individual wellness and the means to achieve it. Out of their concern for the psychological and physical well-being of Aboriginal people, a significant literature focusing on the self has developed, to which I now turn.

Therapy of the self: personal healing, psychological recovery and individual transformation

The comparatively high statistical incidence in Aboriginal communities of what appear at first sight like intensely personal dramas (youth suicide, substance abuse, alcoholism, family violence, sexual offending, mental illness, neglected children and unhealthy or self-destructive lifestyle choices) has led to a fairly extensive literature that directly links issues of Aboriginal well-being with the various and frequent manifestations of individual behavioural and biological dysfunction. Some of this literature is mostly concerned with simply measuring the extent of these manifestations, more often than not in comparison with mainstream Canadian society. Much of it has been produced in the context of the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples, the First Nations Cohesion Project discussed above and occasional government-commissioned studies. Though useful from a statistical standpoint, it mostly takes stock of aggregate situations and rarely brings the analysis beyond what the statistics reveal at face value.

A large and in many ways more compelling segment of this literature, however, calls attention to strategies of personal healing, psychological recovery and individual transformation. It complements the outlook of the social-cohesion/social-capital/capacity-building literature on Aboriginal quality of life in that it posits individual mental, spiritual and physical health as a necessary precondition to well-functioning, cohesive communities. Although it rests largely on a politics of the self, it assumes, like the social-cohesion literature – albeit in a more implicit fashion – that the key to Aboriginal well-being is healthy, ordered and well-balanced communities.

This particular literature comprises two main threads. One stems from conventional scholarship, particularly in psychology, anthropology and the life sciences, and generally operates on the basis of the postulate that there exists a strong connection between Aboriginal quality of life and mental and physical health. The other draws from Aboriginal philosophies to offer more activist pathways of individual transformation and psychological recovery toward community well-being.

Over the past two decades, a substantial and growing body of research and scholarship on the mental and physical health of Aboriginal people in Canada has emerged (see, for example, Kirmayer, Brass, and Tait 2000). Evidence has been available for some time on the complex web of physiological, psychological, spiritual, historical, cultural, economic and environmental factors that have combined over time to create among Aboriginal communities a widespread and generalized state of ill health (Waldram, Herring, and Young 1995), which, most authors infer, constitutes a major obstacle to these communities' ability to elaborate the appropriate measures of redress for a better socioeconomic and political future. To many students of Aboriginal mental health and psychological unease, the most glaring problems seen in Aboriginal communities (high rates of suicide, violence, alcoholism and pervasive demoralization) are the direct consequences of a history of cultural disintegration, disruption of traditional patterns of subsistence and forced separation from the land (Duran and Duran 1995; Waldram 1997; York 1990). The idea that Aboriginal people generally suffer from posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD) has therefore gained much currency in accounts of Aboriginal mental and physical dysfunctions and in attempts at formulating possible treatments (Archibald 2006; Manson et al. 1996; Mitchell and Maracle 2005).

Experts argue that PTSD arises from long-term exposure to external trauma and terrifying experiences resulting in intense fear, helplessness or terror that break a person's sense of predictability, vulnerability and control and can lead to significant social or occupational distress. Mentally, people affected by PTSD may develop negative beliefs about themselves and their world; emotionally, they may experience cycles of denial and anxiety; physically, they may experience sleep disturbances, heightened sensitivity, nightmares and flashbacks; behaviourally, they may avoid certain situations, isolate themselves from their social environment, drink heavily and become increasingly aggressive (Mitchell and Maracle 2005, 16).

Applied to Aboriginal peoples, the PTSD argument implies that their experience of contact with and cultural domination by Euro-Canadians, particularly the lengthy and difficult episode of residential schools (Miller 1996), was of such a harrowing and negative nature that it can reasonably be viewed as having led to the profound psychological despair and unhealthy living conditions that disturb the life of many Aboriginal individuals and communities today (Dion-Stout and Kipling 2003). The notion of PTSD is usually associated with the theory that holds that individuals can be affected deeply by historic traumatic events (civil war, genocide, forced displacement or acculturation of entire communities, and so on) that occurred before their lifetime (Wesley-Esquimaux and Smolewski 2004). Hence, for example, the torment caused to those who directly experienced the abuses of residential school transcends their generation, impacts their behaviour, disables them as fully functioning and responsible adults and continues by extension to have just as negative an effect on the next generations. The trauma of colonialism may keep sowing its hurtful seeds long after it has ceased to be an official policy of the state.

The PTSD argument implicitly provides the analytical backdrop to most studies of psychological or physical health in Aboriginal communities. Although not all such studies necessarily insist pointedly on the transgenerational legacy of colonial dispossession, the literature has tended to focus more generally on the concrete manifestations of this legacy in search of the determinants and possible treatments of individual behavioural disorders and physical dysfunctions in contemporary settings. For example, the prevalence of suicide, particularly among youth, in many Aboriginal communities across Canada has mobilized the scholarly attention of a number of specialists. In 1995, the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples released a special report in which it identified four groups of risk factors associated with suicide: psychobiological (depression, anxiety, schizophrenia), situational (disruptions of family, forced attendance at residential schools, long-term illnesses), socioeconomic (poverty, unemployment, inadequate housing) and cultural stress (erosion of belief systems and spirituality, loss of control over the land, racial discrimination, weakening of political and social institutions). The commission insisted that cultural stress was of particular significance in Aboriginal suicide (Miller-Chenier 1995).

Other more specific studies have documented extremely high rates of suicidal ideation and attempted

suicide among adolescents and young adults in Inuit communities of northern Quebec, pointing out a number of key explanatory factors, including a personal history of psychiatric problems, a parental history of substance abuse or psychiatric disorders, feelings of alienation from the community, a history of physical abuse and a profound crisis of identity and self-esteem, particularly among males who experience difficulty coping with the disruption of their traditional social roles (Kirmayer, Boothroyd, and Hodgins 1998; Kirmayer, Fletcher, and Boothroyd 1998; Kirmayer, Malus, and Boothroyd 1996). Studies done in British Columbia have found, on the other hand, that suicide rates are noticeably lower where cultural continuity is ensured and control over key aspects of political and administrative life is firmly in the hands of the local community (Chandler and Lalonde 1998, 2004, forthcoming). Consequently, they suggest, there is a strong link between high suicide rates in Aboriginal communities and the loss of clear cultural parameters and the lack of local community control.

Suicide is perhaps the most dramatic indicator of distress in Aboriginal communities and, understandably, an important focus of attention in the specialized literature on the mental health and well-being of Aboriginal people. Other issues, however, have also been the object of scholarly attention, notably male violence (Mussell 2005; Pelletier 1993), the well-being of children and the psychological impact on them of ineffective social environments (Bennett and Blackstock 2002; Blackstock et al. 2004), the crisis of individual identity (Briggs 1985; Dorais 1997; Stairs 1992) and the clinical treatment of psychological traumas (Kirmayer 1996a, 1996b). This literature is usually quite informative, and takes stock of various psychosocial problems affecting Aboriginal communities, though it tends to focus primarily on the nature of the phenomena observed rather than on their policy implications.

Be that as it may, concerns over the inadequacy of Western-style approaches to psychotherapy and the apparent inefficacy of government programs and funding at effecting tangible improvements have led a number of researchers to investigate the different ways in which Aboriginal communities cope with the psychological and emotional suffering that troubles their members. Their varied contributions on the topics of community healing and resilience unequivocally indicate that policy choices concerning Aboriginal well-being should give Aboriginal communities considerable latitude in decisions over psychological and

mental health issues and over questions concerning quality of life more generally (Elias and O'Neil 2004; Lemchuk-Favel and Jock 2004; Warry 1998). Aboriginal communities, they argue, have the cultural wherewithal and the knowledge base within themselves to decide what is best for them and to devise the most effective strategies to address and surmount adversity (Lalonde forthcoming). Evidence suggests that Aboriginal communities that are firmly grounded in their culture, confident in their identity and the legitimacy of their traditions and secure in their social and political institutions are healthier, happier and better functioning (Adelson 1998, 2000a, 2000b).

In other words, researchers who have an intimate knowledge of the emotional and psychological stakes involved in Aboriginal well-being seem to agree that Aboriginal quality of life depends largely on the space of political and institutional autonomy that communities ultimately succeed in securing for themselves in accord with their own cultural sensitivities and priorities. As one group of authors explains:

> Government and professional responses to social pathologies — providing more health care or supporting traditional forms of healing — while essential, do not address the most fundamental causes of suffering. Community development and local control of health care systems are needed, not only to make services responsive to local needs but also to promote the sense of individual and collective efficacy and pride that contribute to positive mental health. Ultimately, political efforts to restore Aboriginal rights, settle land claims, and redistribute power through various forms of self-government hold the keys to healthy communities. (Kirmayer, Brass, and Tait 2000, 614)

The *First Nations Health Action Plan* put forward by the Assembly of First Nations (AFN) at the 2004 First Ministers' Meeting echoes such conclusions by calling for a "First Nations controlled and sustainable health system that adopts a holistic, culturally appropriate approach" as its overall objective (Assembly of First Nations 2004, 1). Although the AFN requested additional state funding and governmental engagement in providing a public health infrastructure for Aboriginal people, it insisted on a large measure of self-governance to administer the delivery of services and to determine their nature and content. In the action plan, political and administrative control over health services is presented as an essential precondition for improved health and well-being of Aboriginal people. Self-determination should be the mainstay, the fundamental premise of any policy aimed at mending Aboriginal quality of life.

The extent and nature of self-determination, however, remain a point of contention. While the AFN and

sister Aboriginal organizations are prepared to exercise their inherent rights to self-determination within the institutional parameters of the Canadian state, Aboriginal scholars who have considered quality-of-life issues in Aboriginal communities can have quite a different view on the question. Taiaiake Alfred, for one, sees no tangible improvement possible without "Indigenous insurgency": Aboriginal people need to "disentangle [them]selves from state-imperial identities (tribal or patriotic) and reorient [them]selves on traditional Indigenous identities"; they need to "develop effective structures to mobilize the power of Indigenous identity and values," involve themselves in contentious action and "engage imperial power with dignity in a struggle for justice" (Alfred 2004, 96-97). Alfred's uncompromising activist stance stems from his blunt and direct diagnosis of what ails Aboriginal people:

> The real reason most of our people endure unhappy and unhealthy lives has nothing to do with governmental powers or money. The lack of these things only contributes to making a bad situation worse. The root of the problem is that we are living a spiritual crisis, a darkness that descended on our people at the time we became disconnected from our lands and from our cultures. We are divided amongst ourselves and confused in our minds about who we are and what kind of life we should be living. We depend on others to feed us and to teach us how to look, feel and live. We turn to white men for the answers to our problems. We have started to trust them. There are no more leaders and hardly a place to go where you can just be an Indian. This is a spiritual crisis...Large-scale governmental "solutions" like self-government and land claims are not so much lies as they are irrelevant to this root problem of spiritual crisis. For generations now, we have been on a quest for political power and money; somewhere along the journey from the past to the future, we seem to have forgotten that when we started out our goal was to reconnect with our lands and to preserve our culture and way of life. It is these things that are the true guarantees of peace, health, strength, and happiness — of survival — for Indigenous peoples. (94-95; see also Alfred 2005)

Alfred's view converges with that of other students of Aboriginal mental health who stress the importance of cultural integrity and political control for the improvement of Aboriginal quality of life. However, he advances their findings somewhat and dissociates himself from policy alternatives that involve the state or broad institutional solutions. For him and a number of like-minded colleagues, self-determination implies larger processes of regeneration and decolonization, which "are not at root collective and institutional processes" (Alfred and Corntassel 2005, 611), but processes that begin with the self, with efforts to adhere to a tradition-based spiritual foundation and provide "a new psychological and mental framework for decision-making in our own lives and in that of our communities" (Alfred 2005, 86). As Patricia Monture-Angus puts it,

> self-determination begins with looking at yourself and your family and deciding if and when you are living responsibly. Self-determination is principally, that is first and foremost, about our relationships. Communities cannot be self-determining unless members of those communities are well and living in a responsible way. It is difficult for individuals to be self-determining until they are living as part of their community. (1999, 8)

Ultimately then, inasmuch as self-determination is understood as the key to well-being, whether Aboriginal communities succeed in bringing about the desired level of quality of life is essentially incumbent on the willingness of individuals to embrace healthy lifestyles, bring peace in their relations with others and reconnect themselves with the key cultural parameters of the Aboriginal way of life. In this sense, Aboriginal quality of life and well-being do not hinge so much on appropriate state policies as on individuals' readiness to adopt patterns of personal behaviour more likely to promote individual and collective well-being, including

> mental awakening through the promotion of knowledge; emotional fortitude and the instilling of emotional and psychological stability; the return to traditional diets and regular hard physical labour to purify and strengthen the body; and the rediscovery of meaning outside shallow materialism and consumerism through the restoration of social connections and spiritual rootedness. (Alfred 2005, 87)

White man's burden: Aboriginal policy, individual rights and equality

As the preceding discussion suggested, questions related to Aboriginal quality of life pose a fairly difficult and perplexing conundrum for Canadian policymakers. To what extent should the federal and provincial governments accommodate the particular needs of Aboriginal people to close the quality-of-life gap between them and non-Aboriginal Canadians on all socioeconomic indicators? How can this be achieved without running the risk of fostering the already well entrenched impression among the latter that Aboriginal people are unduly privileged — without, in other words, compromising the fundamental principles of equal citizenship upon which rests the Canadian

polity? In order to solve current issues of Aboriginal quality of life, must Canadians acquiesce to the repeated pleas for enhanced self-government and political autonomy and can they do so without weakening the very foundations of the Canadian state?

Most of the authors and approaches reviewed so far either situate themselves outside the purview of this conundrum or deliberately choose not to formulate the policy stakes of Aboriginal quality of life in those terms. Nevertheless, a substantial majority among them would not disagree that a greater measure of Aboriginal self-government would go a long way toward levelling the playing field for Aboriginal people and consolidating Canada's democratic outlook, and that such a move would in no way threaten the permanency of the Canadian state. Yet several authors whose intellectual influence is considerable in some quarters of the Canadian policy community reject this view. They are generally quite uncomfortable with Aboriginal claims of self-government, and refuse to go along with the assumption that it is a necessary prerequisite to greater Aboriginal well-being.

Alan Cairns's *Citizens Plus* (2000) best exemplifies the apprehension such authors have in grappling with identity-based Aboriginal claims. In this book celebrated for its level-headedness, Cairns revives the recommendations of the Hawthorn Report and suggests that Aboriginal people in Canada be granted a special status that would somehow recognize additional rights. But he also cautions against the tendency, extant in the report of the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples, to give primacy to cultural revitalization and to seek political autonomy for Aboriginal cultures. Cairns insists instead on the degree to which large segments of Canada's Aboriginal population have already successfully integrated into the mainstream and on what he sees as the small cultural distance that separates Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal Canadians to argue that there is no need to modify the institutional and constitutional apparatus to accommodate Aboriginal claims. While he is prepared to recognize in principle and even to support the expression of Aboriginal cultures within the Canadian public space, he argues that these must fit within the institutional parameters and value set that define Canada.

Cairns believes that current Aboriginal claims of self-government and self-determination exaggerate the otherness of Aboriginality, for he thinks that, in the end, there is actually little, culturally and normatively, that differentiates Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal Canadians. In his view – generally shared by all who push the equality argument – that stress on otherness is unproductive. Cairns is satisfied that Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal Canadians have a moral obligation to help each other, and that is sufficient ground to trust that the socioeconomic conditions of Aboriginal people inevitably will improve. In his view, the key to the amelioration of Aboriginal quality of life in Canada lies in the search for solutions that respect and take into consideration the needs of both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal Canadians, not in the aspirations of self-government and territorial autonomy put forward notably by the report of the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples. Should such aspirations be fulfilled, he suggests, they would succeed only in creating small, fiscally weak Aboriginal political entities and endanger the unity of the Canadian political community.

Others, more blunt than Cairns, do not hesitate to maintain that Canada's Aboriginal policy is ill-conceived and that the Canadian state is unwisely giving in to Aboriginal claims, thus pursuing a course that is antithetical to egalitarian objectives and the foundations of Canadian citizenship. Professing to be committed to the socioeconomic advancement of Aboriginal people, they argue that the current structures of Aboriginal governance, increased Aboriginal autonomy and self-government in service delivery and the state's relative openness to claims of self-determination lead to a two-tier, ethnic- or race-based system of government that is not only contrary to liberal democratic tenets, but also does little in the end to improve the quality of life of Aboriginal people.

Melvin Smith, a constitutional expert and former senior civil servant in the British Columbia government, was one of the first to articulate this position fully. In *Our Home or Native Land?* (1995), he lashes out at the federal and provincial governments for giving in to a sense of collective guilt that he claims non-Aboriginal Canadians seem to have for past wrongs done to Aboriginal people and for kowtowing uncritically as a result to their demands. This, he argues, has led to a differential treatment that sets Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal Canadians apart, a situation he finds unacceptable in a liberal-democratic political community like Canada. He also maintains that it has created the unhealthy dependence of Aboriginal people on the state, which, in his view, only perpetuates their inferior socioeconomic status. Too much taxpayers' money is being spent, too many programs are being created with insufficient accountability and unconvincing outcomes.

Smith argues that Canada's Aboriginal policy must be rethought and reframed on the basis of two incontrovertible principles: Aboriginal self-reliance and equality under the law. According to him, self-reliance is born of self-confidence, and he blames non-Aboriginal society for having insulated Aboriginal people from the mainstream with governmental largesse that has simply numbed and incapacitated them. He proposes "jurisdictional integration" to "break down the thicket of laws, regulations and procedures that separate natives from their fellow Canadians [and] break down stereotype attitudes and mindsets" (261-62). There is no panacea for self-reliance, he admits, and some assistance for education, employment training and social improvement might be needed along the way, "but these must not be seen as handouts but as something earned through measurable results on an equal footing with other Canadians" (262).

Above all, Smith puts equality under the law. He does not mean that existing treaty rights and Aboriginal interests, as defined by law and the Constitution, are not valid: First Nations' rights to reserves and established rights must be honoured, but "beyond that, the rule of law extends no solace." Programs and benefits extended by ordinary legislation are subject to repeal or amendment just like any others provided to Canadians (including tax exemptions); similarly, the interests of non-Aboriginal people must also be protected, particularly against supposed Aboriginal legal entitlements over land that is, in fact, the entitlement of all Canadians without distinction.

Smith's position has been endorsed by a number of like-minded authors and organizations. In his award-winning and controversial *First Nations? Second Thoughts* (2000), political scientist Tom Flanagan undertakes to debunk what he calls the "Aboriginal orthodoxy," a set of beliefs that holds, among other things, that

> prior residence in North America is an entitlement to special treatment; that Aboriginal peoples are part of sovereign nations endowed with an inherent right to self-government; that Aboriginals must have collective rather than individual property rights; that all treaties must be renegotiated on a "nation-to-nation" basis; and that native people should be encouraged to build prosperous "aboriginal economies" through money, land, and natural resources transferred from other Canadians. (Flanagan 2000, i)

For Flanagan, these assumptions, which inform current Aboriginal political claims and governmental policy, are not only unfounded, they are highly suspect. Should the Aboriginal orthodoxy as he sees it come to dominate the Canadian policy landscape, "[i]t would establish aboriginal nations as privileged political communities with membership defined by race and passed on through descent; [i]t would redefine Canada as an association of racial communities rather than a polity whose members are individual human beings" (194). The Aboriginal orthodoxy, Flanagan further argues, misleads Aboriginal people into focusing on Euro-Canadians as the source of their misfortune and into thinking wrongly that obtaining financial reparation from their oppressors will produce independence and prosperity. Finally, Flanagan is concerned that the Aboriginal orthodoxy "encourages Aboriginal people to withdraw into themselves," into their own "First Nations," under their "self-governments," on their own "traditional lands," within their own "aboriginal economies" (195), which, in his view, would be a disastrous direction to take, for only a small political and professional local Aboriginal elite would benefit, to the detriment of the majority.

Flanagan argues that the way out of what troubles Aboriginal communities and individuals is relatively simple: "Aboriginal people need to acquire the skills and attitudes that bring success in a liberal society, political democracy and market economy" (195-96). To this end, he calls for a greater measure of integration by Aboriginal people into the mainstream of Canadian society, more accountability on the part of Aboriginal governments and administrations, the deconcentration of power away from band councils in matters of service delivery and management and the introduction of a regime of individual property rights.

The themes Smith and Flanagan address have been picked up by a number of civil society organizations and think tanks. The Canadian Taxpayers Federation (CTF), for example, has produced a number of position papers (Fiss 2002, 2004, 2005a, 2005b) that seek to rekindle the vision contained in the much-criticized 1969 White Paper (Canada 1969) and to blame the balkanization and segregation effects of the First Nations reserve system for the poor socioeconomic situation of Aboriginal communities and individuals: as they are isolated and exist outside the mainstream of Canadian society, they are not given full opportunities to enjoy the benefits of Canadian citizenship. If anything, these papers argue, the special treatment offered by the state has been to no avail, as increased government spending has failed to improve health and other social indicators for Aboriginal people. Rather, the key

to long-term economic viability and, by extension, to a better quality of life for Aboriginal communities is easily identifiable individual property that can be leveraged for loans and wealth creation. As the *Indian Act* precludes the enjoyment of private property rights on reserves, the CTF argues, it must be abolished. Aboriginal Canadians must be brought into the economic mainstream and be treated like any other Canadians. To that end, the CTF suggests, all Aboriginal communities should be municipalized, submitted to the same rules of good governance, transparency and accountability in force all over the country, and their constituents no longer exempted from paying taxes (as provided in the *Indian Act*). In short, the CTF calls for no less than an end to the status quo if Aboriginal people are to be truly self-sustaining.

The twin ideas that the current institutional structures of Aboriginal governance are inadequate and that individual rights are superior to collective arrangements are recurring, interwoven motifs of the equality argument. They clearly intimate that the quality of life of Aboriginal people would be greatly improved if the current band council-driven system of governance was completely overhauled in favour of mechanisms that would submit Aboriginal political and administrative leaders to close and inescapable accountability and that would give individuals a much greater measure of autonomy and control over their leaders. The virtues of individual freedom over collective or bureaucratic dictates are touted as the way out of the adverse conditions Aboriginal people experience.

Jean Allard, a Métis politician and former NDP Manitoba MLA, argues that modern checks and balances applied to Aboriginal leaders do not operate, as there is no real separation between politics and administration on reserves. In the wake of the rejection of the 1969 White Paper, he explains, an unholy alliance of Indian Affairs bureaucrats and Aboriginal elites has ensued and, as a result, "chiefs, councils and their allies – who make up the ruling elite – exercise power and control over the lives of people who live on reserves that is unheard of in a democratic country. They control everything: from who gets the on-reserve jobs to who gets plumbing repairs. The ruling elite exercises total control while the impoverished class is voiceless and powerless" (Allard 2002, 131). This situation, which, Allard suggests, is fraught with "nepotism, fraud, corruption and abuse of human rights" (133), is largely responsible for the mass migration away from the reserves of Aboriginal people in search of a better social environment in urban centres. To deflect the problem, he proposes that the payment of treaty money be recalculated to reflect current value and redirected as cash handouts into the pockets of individuals and families in a move to bypass the authority and control of band councils.

Allard's analysis has been quoted approvingly in documents of the C.D. Howe Institute and the Frontier Centre for Public Policy. In a recent C.D. Howe Institute study, John Richards (2006), in particular, offers his own blueprint for the improvement of Aboriginal socioeconomic conditions. He zeroes in on the importance of providing high-quality education and school services that will enable Aboriginal youth to acquire the skills and qualifications necessary to adapt to and compete successfully in the labour market. Noticing that off-reserve Aboriginal students tend to perform better in school than their on-reserve peers, Richards suggests that "reform requires greater professionalism in school administration" and, following Allard's view, argues that this, "in turn, will almost certainly require individual bands to cede authority over schools to larger organizations such as tribal councils or to new, province-wide Aboriginal school boards, and that reserve schools [should] integrate curricula and student testing more closely with the relevant province" (2006, 122). Similarly, he proposes "to withdraw from individual bands the authority to distribute welfare and to entrust the function, with an accompanying budget, to an intertribal social assistance agency for each province" (124). In another C.D. Howe Institute paper, Richards (2003) totally endorses Allard's proposal to pay treaty benefits to individuals, regardless of their place of residence, and suggests introducing own-source taxation to Indian bands.

Although, on the face of it, the equality argument may seem unfairly critical of the supposed privileges and prerogatives enjoyed by Aboriginal people, it is, in fact, cautiously constructed precisely so as to not appear unsupportive of Aboriginal people. Equality under the law, the argument goes, is important not so much because the want of it would be unfair to non-Aboriginal people, but primarily because it is crucial to the well-being of Aboriginal people, as it guarantees their access to the mainstream of Canadian society and thus to superior standards of living. For proponents of the equality argument, Aboriginal people are not the problem; the whole institutional apparatus to which they are submitted clearly is. Though there is no reason to suspect that their desire to recast Aboriginal policy for the betterment of Aboriginal quality of life is not genuine, in reality their vision is in tension with the

goals of cultural protection and revitalization put forward since the 1969 White Paper by Aboriginal intellectuals and leaders and by non-Aboriginal sympathizers who argue that Aboriginal quality of life can be improved only on Aboriginal people's own terms and not according to some prepackaged Eurocentric notion of equality and the good life.

The often incisive insinuations that there is an Aboriginal "orthodoxy" – or that it is in the interest of a few to keep the current state of affairs unchanged – the call for an end to Aboriginal tax exemptions, the alarm over self-government and land-settlement agreements, the repeated insistence on objectives of strict civic equality and market solutions all underscore the profound unease of proponents of the equality argument with the prospect that Aboriginal people might be empowered in ways that would set them in a separate and autonomous sphere of citizenship. They are, in the end, essentially concerned that the legitimization of an Aboriginal civic and cultural identity that would not fully correspond to Canada's own would threaten the institutional coherence and civic cohesiveness of the Canadian political community. However unfounded or inappropriate such a concern may seem to critics (see, for example, Alfred 2000; Rotman 2001), it is real and likely to remain a factor in debates and discussions over Aboriginal policy for some time to come.

Looking Ahead

What have we learned? There is a clear consensus throughout the literature reviewed in the previous section about the considerable socioeconomic deficit of Aboriginal people in Canada. No one dismisses their plight or downplays their often-difficult reality. There is also widespread agreement about the urgency of finding appropriate responses that will quickly lead to tangible improvements in the general quality of life of Aboriginal people. However, the range of policy choices that would deliver the most favourable outcomes is not only segmented by the different understandings of what is a good quality of life, but also split between two broad, diverging visions of how to achieve it in the best interest of Aboriginal people. Authors who emphasize capacity-building, community empowerment and cultural revitalization generally support the idea that a significantly greater measure of self-determination

and political autonomy is crucial to bringing about a better life and enhanced sense of well-being among Aboriginal people; this is by and large the vision propounded by the report of the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples. Some influential authors and organizations believe, however, that identity-based claims of self-determination and self-government further isolate Aboriginal people from access to the well-being and the good life one can experience in the mainstream of society, unnecessarily pit Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal Canadians against each other and threaten the institutional and constitutional structures of the country; this is a vision largely inherited from the 1969 White Paper and still very much alive in some of the policy discourse on Aboriginal people.

These two perspectives are fundamentally at odds. They rest on markedly different and opposite programmatic rationales of what is best for Aboriginal people. Which one should future research on Aboriginal quality of life draw from and expand? This is a choice that the Canadian state itself has not quite resolved to make. Indeed, both visions exercise their contrary influence on Canada's Aboriginal policy as the state seems to oscillate between them.[16] In truth, future research must transcend this choice -- in part, because of the problematic nature of some of the assumptions upon which the overall literature rests, but mostly because the work done within both visions generally fails to account for the failure to improve Aboriginal quality of life in any significant and sustained fashion, despite current, extensive knowledge of the problems.

There is no denying that numerous Aboriginal communities have seen their lot improve substantially thanks to the work of community-conscious and culturally sensitive individuals and organizations, including state agencies. Still, it is not entirely clear how far pressing local communities to regain balance and enhance social capital will take them on the way to improved well-being for all Aboriginal people without a serious, critical consideration of the structures of power and patterns of social relations that are primarily responsible for the difficulties they face. Therein lies one of the most urgent analytical challenges that confront us in our search for the improvement of Aboriginal quality of life and in the process of devising transformative policy alternatives.

The many different ways of addressing and conceiving Aboriginal well-being and the seeming inability or unwillingness of the state to abide fully

by the constitutionally entrenched recognition of Aboriginal people's inherent right to live by their own cultural and political norms bear witness to the eminently political and ideological nature of the stakes involved in any consideration of how to improve Aboriginal quality of life. This speaks, of course, to the presence of opposite world views and strongly competing interests; more significantly, it reveals the great discomfort of mainstream Canadian society at the prospect of radically transformed social hierarchies and patterns of power should Aboriginal claims of cultural otherness and political autonomy be one day fully and unequivocally accepted and actually realized.

Yet perhaps the most surprising observation one is forced to make at the end of this survey of the literature is that the fundamentally political character of Aboriginal quality of life remains insufficiently acknowledged by the vast majority of the authors reviewed. To be sure, the particular views of writers such as Alfred, Monture-Angus and Flanagan can be said to be driven by intensely political motivations. The radical and uncompromising tone of their respective positions and their emphasis on issues of identity, sovereignty and constitutional law lend their work a political – some would say ideological – resonance. That said, their analysis, like a good deal of the rest of the literature for that matter, does not really address the *politics* of Aboriginal quality of life. Notwithstanding the richness, usefulness and diversity of the insights and data delivered by the approaches reviewed, few authors actually seek to tackle the reasons the socioeconomic conditions of Aboriginal people still remain substandard in the aggregate and have even deteriorated further in some cases.

This absence of focus on the politics of Aboriginal quality of life may well have to do with the analytical angle of much of the research. The emphasis on social cohesion, for example, tends to depoliticize social relations: it masks the expression of contradictory interests, the dynamics of power and resistance that gives them life, the inevitable social hierarchies and the relations of domination and ruling that enforce and maintain them. Social cohesion or, more precisely, the veneer of social and political stability it evokes is not a natural, felicitous state of society. It is usually the end result of a sociopolitical process whereby cultural norms, social codes of conduct, ideological parameters and mechanisms of moral and social regulation have been internalized by the majority of the population after having been imposed

– more often than not through successful episodes of repression and coercion – by one or a few groups that have succeeded in establishing their dominion and hegemonic grip over the whole of society.

On the whole, the social-cohesion/social-capital/ capacity-building perspective is less concerned about whether the structures of power and domination left by the legacy of troubled relations between Euro-Canadians and Aboriginal people still have an impact on the persistent disparities Aboriginal people face. This approach also does not question whether macrostructural dimensions such as the dominant pattern of power relations or the inner logic of the Canadian political economy might be at cause. It shies away, in other words, from exploring the systemic obstacles to the improvement of Aboriginal socioeconomic conditions, and emphasizes instead the creation of social capital and capacity development, a much less controversial handle on the question of Aboriginal quality of life – and much less threatening to the status quo – clearly implying that the source of the problem is the community itself, its inability to prevent the failure of its integrative functions or to adapt to the demands of the global environment.

The communitarian thinking that permeates some discussions on capacity-building in particular seems to argue for a return to an almost mythical community where the restoration of traditions would perforce ensure a better living. It may well be – indeed, there are examples where community healing and capacity were achieved thanks in part to the reconnection of the community with past practices and philosophies. But again, heavily communitarian conceptions of well-being blur internal political divisions and downplay tensions between diverging interests: they do little in the end to shed light on the societal dynamics that block or stall the emergence of improved socioeconomic conditions.

Similarly, the psychocultural-therapeutic perspective detracts attention from the global context that has shaped the current socioeconomic conditions of Aboriginal people. The focus on personal healing and transformation of the self is undeniably persuasive; it does, on the face of it, make good sense. Mentally healthy individuals are more likely to contribute positively to their community, and a community of mentally healthy individuals will be better equipped to acquire and provide its members with the requisites of a life of good quality. The flip side of this conventional wisdom is that the onus of success is entirely on the individual: communities that fail to regain control of

their destiny and to function well are seen, implicitly, as communities where the bulk of individuals have yet to heal their psychological wounds, rebuild their relations and take charge of their lives. This emphasis on the individual as the key to increased well-being, however, fails to consider the impact of socioenvironmental stress factors on the ability of individuals to succeed in their attempt to heal. The willpower to change oneself and transform one's community may well be active and genuine, but it could also be hampered by structural and systemic impediments that are far-reaching and stronger than the resolve of all the well-intentioned individuals of a community.

The research surveyed here reveals that Canadian policy-makers have at their disposal a wealth of cutting-edge research and information on the extent of the socioeconomic deficit of Aboriginal people, on the roots of this deficit, on its long-term social and psychological consequences and on several policy choices and courses of action that have been tried and others that could conceivably yield better outcomes. Yet the persistence of adverse social, human and economic conditions in a still large number of Aboriginal communities across the country raises not so much issues of capacity, expertise or resources — clearly, Canada has them — but the question of the political willingness to do what is most appropriate to reverse the situation. As the chasm between the policies purportedly designed to improve Aboriginal quality of life and the actual social and economic reality of Aboriginal people endures, it may now be necessary to complement the foci of current Aboriginal quality-of-life research with analytical perspectives and questions geared to address and better understand the reasons for this persistence.

Political scientists Kiera Ladner and Michael Orsini argue, using the neo-institutionalist concept of path dependency, that Canada's Aboriginal policy is deeply set in a long-standing colonial paradigm that so thoroughly pervades the whole bureaucratic and political mindset that it has become virtually impossible to effect any real modification of the unequal dynamics of power relations between Aboriginal people and non-Aboriginal Canadians. A kind of bureaucratic and political inertia is at play, casting Aboriginal people as inferior, subaltern beings, precluding as a result the establishment of a truly egalitarian relationship between them and the Canadian state and blocking any possibility of renewing Aboriginal governance (Ladner and Orsini 2004, 2005). Such an explanation steers us on a different and, in many ways, more promising path to understanding why things hardly ever change for Aboriginal people. Further research and analysis are needed, though, to elucidate the reasons that make this force of inertia so unflinching and intractable.

Personal and collective well-being, a life of good quality, fulfilling both mentally and physically, cannot just be willed or engineered to happen through given policy choices. Differences in quality of life are steeped in relations of power, in social hierarchies and in societal processes whereby the state or some groups or individuals monopolize and restrict access to resources, knowledge or privileges known to promote well-being and prevent others by their action from enjoying to the same extent they do what makes life good. Whether individuals or whole communities can experience a life blessed with decent measures of good quality largely depends on how well they fare in the dynamics of power that characterize their society, on how successful they are at imposing their own terms and conditions of social cohabitation or at securing for themselves an enviable place in the socioeconomic pecking order. One cannot stress enough, therefore, the importance of properly grasping the politics of Aboriginal quality of life. New research must be developed to understand the link between the glacial pace of improvement of the socioeconomic conditions of Aboriginal people and the political obstacles to real change, be they institutional or bureaucratic sclerosis (as Ladner and Orsini suggest), deeply entrenched vested interests, market forces, systemic discrimination, Eurocentric cultural conceit or a combination of all these.

Existing research on capacity-building, community economic empowerment and psychological healing has yielded undeniably crucial insights that can contribute to the formulation of workable solutions. However, they risk being of limited effect if the institutional environment works in the end against any initiative of socioeconomic improvement. The recounting of successful stories of community economic empowerment, for example, points to interesting possibilities. Yet not all communities have the same agenda or the same objectives, and exportability need not be an important standard of success. Still, one cannot help but wonder why some communities rally behind a collective project of economic recovery and succeed, while others cannot seem to pull it together despite genuinely good intentions. Why, when there is no want of reliable data, good policy ideas or proven approaches to what ails Aboriginal communities, is so little progress

actually made on the whole? These simple questions raise complex political considerations and systemic issues that need to be identified and understood in order to grasp the reasons why solutions that seem to work are not universalized.

The findings of the research examined in this paper have taken the policy community quite a long way toward better appreciating the reality of quality-of-life issues for Aboriginal people in Canada. Future research should definitely build on and deepen that body of knowledge, but should now include as well more explicit attempts at elucidating the reasons why unrelenting obstacles to tangible, positive change continue to go unchecked.

The search for ways to remove obstacles to real change hinges largely on the development of a greater analytical willingness to contextualize Aboriginal quality-of-life issues within dynamics of tensions resulting from competition over scarce or contested resources, the maintenance of social hierarchies disadvantageous to Aboriginal people and the social processes of racialization and marginalization inherited from past colonial practices. In order to further our understanding of Aboriginal quality of life, future research should seek to explore the nature and impact of such dynamics. Concretely, this could translate into a variety of research endeavours that are sketched briefly below. They do not exhaust the full range of research projects that could be devised. They are presented here in broad outlines to suggest avenues to push forward our thinking on Aboriginal quality of life and inform concrete action for change.

Questioning the market. Economics is by all accounts a prime determinant of quality of life. Several authors insist on the importance of community economic empowerment as a crucial vector of well-being for Aboriginal people. However, few, if any, address the social rigidities of market forces, the difficulty of transforming market-driven social relations of power to the advantage of groups that have not historically benefited from a position of strength in the market. We need to know with more precision how market imperatives and the actions of groups that exercise significant control over market forces affect the economic possibilities of Aboriginal communities. To be sure, a number of studies attest to the ability of quite a few communities to cope with and even thrive under market conditions, but those are the exceptions rather than the norm. The reluctance of governments to settle land claims quickly to the unequivocal benefit of Aboriginal communities clearly indicates that

there is much at stake for the state and non-Aboriginal Canadians in settlements that would, in some cases, allow Aboriginal people control over large pools of economically sensitive natural resources. Why does the Canadian state, which is theoretically prepared to recognize Aboriginal titles and other rights, willfully create obstacles to the full enjoyment by Aboriginal people of ready sources of economic well-being? Questions of this nature need to be examined thoroughly, for there is little sense in calling for ways to reinforce social cohesion, create social capital or build capacity if direct access to key economic tools, one of the fundamental means to counteract social disintegration and inequality, continues to elude Aboriginal people.

Looking into patterns of exclusion. The primary focus of evidence-based studies on documenting the end results of the socioeconomic marginalization of Aboriginal people neglects in the end to engage in a much-needed examination of the social processes of exclusion that are at work. Social relations of power around the market are definitely important, but the market is not the only locus of exclusionary social practices. Racism, cultural ostracism and delegitimization in the public sphere also factor into the social subordination of minority groups. Although Canada has clear and uncompromising antidiscrimination policies, mechanisms of social exclusion and suspicion toward the *other* may still operate in subtle, unsuspected ways. A poll conducted in 2004 by the Centre for Research and Information on Canada suggested that almost one in two Canadians (49 percent) believe that the living conditions of Aboriginal people are on an equal footing with or better than those of non-Aboriginal Canadians. Only 29 percent of respondents rated improving the quality of life of Aboriginal people a high policy priority. Respondents were also asked to place in order of priority a list of 11 government tasks: improving the quality of life of Aboriginal people came in second-to-last. More recently, a report on a study done in November 2005 by Ipsos Reid for Indian and Northern Affairs Canada revealed that "Canadians, depending on their education, either question the fairness of aboriginal entitlements or believe they foster a culture of dependency" (Aubry 2006, A11).

How does the disinclination of non-Aboriginal Canadians to support Aboriginal claims manifest itself? To what extent does it hold back the improvement of the socioeconomic conditions of Aboriginal people? Questions such as these speak directly to the nature of the social interface between Aboriginal people and non-Aboriginal Canadians. We need to develop a better

understanding of the relations of social power and domination that inevitably create a distance between the two groups and likely foster the socioeconomic marginalization of Aboriginal people. Striving to transform these relations into a truly egalitarian rapport would create a more level playing field that could facilitate the positive evolution of Aboriginal socioeconomic conditions. The work of Joyce Green (1995, 2003, 2005) on the colonialist nature of Canadian state power and of Sherene Razack (2002) and Bonita Lawrence (2002, 2004) on the racial hierarchies that pervade Canadian society and keep Aboriginal people on the outer edges of the public space constitutes in that regard an emerging body of critical analysis that forces a more attentive consideration of the sources of Aboriginal marginalization and compromised quality of life.

The effects of welfare retrenchment. Like most other Western jurisdictions, the Canadian state has made appreciable cuts in welfare programs, unemployment assistance and social services over the past decades. These cuts have had a direct, usually negative effect on the most vulnerable groups of society, including Aboriginal people. We need new research on the impact of Canada's recent social policies on the well-being of Aboriginal people. How has welfare retrenchment affected their quality of life? This is a fairly important question, for if one establishes that the state's social policies do little to improve the socioeconomic conditions of Aboriginal people, it raises the question of its role in the persistence of considerable gaps in social and economic performance between Aboriginal people and non-Aboriginal Canadians.

Internal sociopolitical dynamics. Aboriginal communities are no more immune to internal social and political strife than any other human communities. How do existing modes of governance, the control exercised by local elites over access to and distribution of collective resources and the political and administrative proximity of some chiefs and band councils to the Canadian state bureaucracy affect the ability of community members to enjoy a fair measure of well-being? Are internal community tensions resolved with relative ease to the satisfaction of all parties, or do they compromise the development of a social environment conducive to both individual and collective well-being? These questions are not meant to raise doubts about the ability of Aboriginal communities to govern themselves; they suggest, rather, that the reality of sociopolitical conflict must be acknowledged and better understood so as to grasp

and eventually act upon the dynamics of opposition that are likely to affect negatively the capacity of a community to create and maintain proper conditions of general well-being. Different communities will cope differently with the challenges of conflict. It would therefore be useful to produce a number of ethnographic studies of diverse cases to draw as comprehensive a picture as possible of the impact of internal community politics on quality-of-life issues.

Policy audits. While it is true that governments contribute a significant amount of financial and human resources to improve the socioeconomic conditions of Aboriginal people, many programs and policies are not as efficient as might be expected in enhancing their quality of life. A renewed research agenda should incorporate a policy audit related to Aboriginal quality of life. Do governments fully deliver on their promises to Aboriginal people? Were the programs and policies adequately conceived to achieve tangible goals of positive social change within the relevant communities? We need studies that closely examine governmental action on Aboriginal quality-of-life issues and set benchmarks for evaluation. Government rhetoric is often self-congratulatory and tends to inflate the significance of its action with respect to Aboriginal people. Policy audits would serve to separate fact from fiction.

The above suggestions imply that new research questions need to be formulated. They may take us away from research predicated on adjusting or improving upon existing Aboriginal policy, but 40 years after the Hawthorn Report, how much more tweaking of Aboriginal policies must Aboriginal people tolerate before things really change for the better? How much longer can they submit to the state's guessing game as to what may or may not work to improve their situation? Hard questions about how to transform the structures that constantly preclude the real advancement of Aboriginal people now need to be asked and elucidated, and consequent action taken.

In fairness, one must acknowledge that such hard questions have already been asked, more than once. One need only remember the probing voice of Harold Cardinal, whose incisive *The Unjust Society* (1969) and *The Rebirth of Canada's Indians* (1977) clearly confronted not only the Canadian state and settler society, but also Aboriginal people themselves, and proposed distinct courses of action toward social and cultural revitalization. The Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples certainly raised a multitude of

uneasy questions as well, and called for clear alterna-
tives designed to empower Aboriginal people and
establish their relationship with non-Aboriginal
Canadians on a more equal footing. Over the past
three decades Aboriginal people have formulated self-
determining choices, often in confident and unequiv-
ocal terms, with a view to exercise their own power
outside the boundaries of the colonial parameters that
have historically defined their existence within the
Canadian state. They have, in so doing, called
Canadians and even their own leadership to account
in no uncertain terms.

Still, chances are that "progress will not material-
ize," as scholars Roger Maaka and Augie Fleras argue,
"until Aboriginal peoples-state relations are
addressed within the context of rights not needs, of
relationships not restitution, and of engagement not
extinguishment" (Maaka and Fleras 2005: 209-210).
Today, this particular challenge of reconceptualizing,
as it were, the social and political sphere within
which Aboriginal people must exist is being taken up
by a number of Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal
scholars concerned with issues underlying Aboriginal
quality of life. The works of political scientist Kiera
Ladner (2005), political theorist James Tully (1995)
and legal scholars John Borrows (2002) and Patrick
Macklem (2002), to name but some of the more com-
pelling voices, suggest paths of institutional reconfig-
uration that can potentially address and resolve the
difficult political questions. But as Maaka and Fleras
remind us, "any moves to re-prime the constitutional
agenda by re-configuring the political landscape will
remain muddled without a political will to absorb the
pending shocks" (2005: 210).

In the end, it all boils down to one inescapable
reality: significant improvements to Aboriginal
quality of life hinge on a fundamental, genuine and
widespread political commitment to social change
and social justice for Aboriginal people. How deep-
reaching must this commitment be, and just how far
are Canadians prepared to go to ensure that it pays
more than lip service to some democratic ideal?
Those are probably the toughest questions. The fact
is, as things stand now we cannot sincerely carry on
without coming to terms with them. True democracy
requires no less.

Notes

1 In this paper, the term "Aboriginal" is generally used to refer to First Nations, Inuit and Métis. In this, I follow accepted Canadian usage as well as the definition in section 35(2) of the *Constitution Act, 1982*. The appearance of other terms, such as "Indian" or "native," reflects usage in certain official documents and quotations from some of the authors reviewed. I have refrained from using the term "Indigenous," which usually refers to Aboriginal peoples in the context of international organizations and political movements.

2 On May 22, 2006, the Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights of the United Nations Economic and Social Council released its assessment of Canada's fourth and fifth periodic reports on the implementation of the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights. The committee expressed serious concerns about the social and economic well-being of Aboriginal people in Canada – notably, the fact that "significant disparities still remain between Aboriginal people and the rest of the population in areas of employment, access to water, health, housing and education," and that "the long-standing issues of discrimination against First Nations women and their children, in matters relating to Indian status, Band membership and matrimonial property on reserve lands have still not been resolved," much to the detriment of "the enjoyment of economic, social and cultural rights of First Nations women and their children under the Covenant." The committee also noted with some unease that, despite the state's commitment to refrain from resorting to the extinguishment of Aboriginal rights and titles, Canada's current approaches to land claims "do not differ much from the extinguishment and surrender approach" (United Nations 2006, 4).

In 2004, Rodolfo Stavenhagen, the Special Rapporteur of the United Nations Human Rights Commission, presented a report on the condition of Aboriginal people in Canada that was equally troubling. Following fact-finding missions in May 2003 and May 2004, Stavenhagen concluded that much work remains to be done to improve the social, economic and environmental conditions of Aboriginal people in Canada: "Poverty, infant mortality, unemployment, morbidity, suicide, criminal detention, children on welfare, women victims of abuse, child prostitution, are all much higher among Aboriginal people than in any other sector of Canadian society, whereas educational attainment, health standards, housing conditions, family income, access to economic opportunity and to social services are generally lower" (United Nations 2004, 2). The Special Rapporteur also argued that Canada has disregarded the socioeconomic objectives to which it is committed under international human law.

3 The best known of these is the federal government's *Gathering Strength: Canada's Aboriginal Action Plan* (Canada 1997), released in direct response to the report of the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples. In it

the government vows (in addition to "renewing the partnerships" with Aboriginal peoples, "strengthening Aboriginal governance" and "developing a new fiscal relationship") to support strong communities, people and economies by "improving health and public safety, investing in people and strengthening Aboriginal economic development," which the government claims will materialize into providing "adequate housing and clean water; access to education and training opportunities; the opportunity to participate in the economy and earn a meaningful livelihood; and access to the health, social and cultural supports needed to ensure that people can remain healthy."

The provinces have articulated similar goals. The Web site of the Manitoba Department of Aboriginal and Northern Affairs, for instance, informs readers that the departmental vision is "an improved quality of life and opportunities for Aboriginal and northern Manitobans," and lists among its goals "to support the mental, emotional, physical and spiritual health of northern communities and Aboriginal people" and to "strengthen the participation of Aboriginal and northern people in Manitoba's economy." In its Aboriginal policy framework, *Strengthening Relationships* (Alberta 2000), Alberta claims to foster "goals of individual and community well-being and self-reliance" for its Aboriginal constituents. The business plan of the Ministry of Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development lists among its strategic priorities for the next three years "[the enhancement of] the quality of life of First Nation and Métis people through the coordination and facilitation of cross-ministry partnerships with First Nation and Métis organizations to address early childhood development, family violence, public and post-secondary education, training to employment and healthy families." Ontario, for its part, claims that it is "charting a new course for constructive, cooperative relationships with Aboriginal peoples of Ontario – a relationship sustained by mutual respect and that leads to improved opportunities and a better future for Aboriginal children and youth." The policy narratives of the other provincial governments exhibit, with some variants, the same insistence on fostering a better quality of life for Aboriginal people.

4 Among these indices Sharpe reviews five that provide historically consistent estimates of trends of well-being in Canada: the Measure of Economic Welfare, developed by William Nordhaus and James Tobin and estimated for Canada by Statistics Canada; the Genuine Progress Indicator, developed by the Redefining Progress Institute and estimated for Canada by Statistics Canada; the Index of Economic Well-Being, developed by the Centre for the Study of Living Standards; the Index of Social Health, developed at Fordham University and estimated for Canada by Human Resources Development Canada; and the Index of Living Standards, produced by the Fraser Institute. Sharpe also looks at three cross-national indexes: the Human Development Index, developed by the United Nations Development Program; the Quality of Life Index, developed by Ed Diener of the University of

Illinois; and the Index of Social Progress, developed by Richard Estes of the University of Pennsylvania. Finally, Sharpe reviews three other indexes that provide estimates of trends in well-being for Canadian provinces and communities: the Quality of Life Index, developed by the Ontario Social Development Council; the Ottawa-Carleton Quality of Life Index, developed by the Social Planning Council of Ottawa-Carleton, and the BC Stats Index of Regional Indicators. The two sets of social indicators he surveys are the Quality of Life Template, developed by the Canadian Federation of Municipalities, and the Oregon Benchmarks, developed by the Oregon Progress Board.

5   Among these are the Ryerson Social Reporting Network's Structural Exclusion Index (Burke and Shields 2000) and the Economic Freedom for the Rest of Us Index (Brown and Stanford 2000), which have been devised to better reflect the structural vulnerability to which Canadians' standard of living and sources of income are exposed, as well as Alberta's Genuine Progress Indicator (GPI) Sustainability Circle, GPI Atlantic and Bhutan's Gross National Happiness (Findlay and Russell 2005), which put community values at the centre of considerations of well-being.

6   See the Web site of the Quality of Life Research Unit: http://www.utoronto.ca/qol/concepts.htm

7   Good examples of such references are Four Worlds International Institute (n.d.) and Mussell (2005).

8   The literature reviewed here includes almost exclusively works published in English. I chose to do so deliberately, in part for reasons of space, as the literature on Aboriginal people produced in French by Quebec scholars and researchers is as important as, if not more voluminous than, its anglophone counterpart, but also because questions related to Aboriginal quality of life do not figure as prominently or as explicitly in Quebec as in the rest of Canada. In order to maintain coherence, I opted to focus only on the English-Canadian literature that directly addresses Aboriginal quality of life. It would be instructive eventually to examine both Quebec and English-Canadian scholarship on Aboriginal people in comparative perspective. See Tremblay and Lévesque (1993); Lévesque (2002).

9   In his 1988 diagnosis of the debacle of the Meech Lake Accord, Alan Cairns wrote:
       The bitterness and passion that inform the presentations of the numerous groups objecting to the Accord are not based on a narrow instrumental calculation of its effects on the future flow of material benefits. Their anger is not driven by the fear of tangible gains foregone, but by a more complex battery of emotions. The representatives of women's groups, of aboriginals, of visible minorities, of supporters of multiculturalism, along with northerners and basic defenders of the Charter employ the vocabulary of personal and group identity, of being included or excluded, of being accepted or being treated as an outsider, of being treated with respect as a worthy participant or being cast into the audience as a spectator as one's fate is being decided by others. They employ the language of status — they are insulted, wounded, hurt, offended, bypassed, not invited, ignored, left out, and shunted aside. They evaluate their treatment through the lens of pride, dignity, honour, propriety, legitimacy, and recognition — or their

reverse. Their discourse is a minority, outsider discourse. They clearly distrust established governing elites...The constitution is now the central arena within which the groups of an increasingly plural society defined, inter alia, by gender, ethnicity, and language vie with each other for recognition and acceptance. That competition underlines the dissensus in Canada over the criteria to be employed which, in turn, has the effect of making particular constitutional outcomes unstable. Canadians have stumbled into a constitutional game without having agreed on the rules to govern the competition or the norms that the results are to serve. (1988, S139-S140, S-138)

10   As one early document of the Policy Research Initiative (PRI) notes: "[A]s we approach the 21st century, our sense of common purpose is being eroded by a number of trends, some within the federal government's control, others outside it. Our research indicates that these trends, if not recognized and dealt with over the next few years, could fragment and polarize our society, put individuals and communities under pressure and undermine the consensus that has underpinned social cohesion in the country for most of the past century" (Policy Research Initiative 1996, 1). The PRI was created in 1996 to enhance the policy capacity of the federal government, and brought together most of the key policy and research outfits of the state in a collective and focused effort to identify and act upon important social and economic issues likely to affect the future of Canada.

11   Some estimate that, "in any given year, the Aboriginal policy agenda accounts for anywhere from 10 to 30 percent of Parliament's time, and litigation cases pertaining to Aboriginal issues have no rival in terms of the dollar amount in contingent liability that is at risk to the Crown" (Beavon, White, and Maxim 2004, 1:2).

12   This actually seldom happens; see Rodon (2003).

13   Funding is regularly extended and opportunities have been created through Indian and Northern Affairs Canada, Human Resources Development Canada, Canadian Heritage and several other federal government agencies to help band and tribal councils meet the demands of program management and equip the members of their communities with the necessary skills and education to adjust to labour market imperatives and to take control of their own community economic development. For an overview of key programs, see Newhouse, Fitzmaurice, and Belanger (2005).

14   CANDO was founded in 1990 by economic development officers (EDOs) from across Canada to provide a national body to focus on the training, education and networking opportunities necessary to serve their communities and/or organizations as professionals. CANDO is Aboriginal controlled, community based and membership driven, and is directed by a national, regionally represented volunteer board of elected EDOs. CANDO's stated mission includes, among other objectives, building capacity both for individuals engaged in economic development and for the community; actively supporting community economic development initiatives toward strong, competitive and self-sustaining Aboriginal economies; and providing

and facilitating educational and training opportunities (see CANDO's Web site at http://www.edo.ca).

15 The journal's current editorial board includes Robert B. Anderson, Faculty of Administration, University of Regina; David Newhouse, Department of Native Studies, Trent University; Robert Oppenheimer, John Molson School of Business, Concordia University; Frank Tough, School of Native Studies, University of Alberta; Fred Wien, Maritime School of Social Work, Dalhousie University; Yale Belanger, Department of Native American Studies, University of Lethbridge; Warren Weir, MBA Indigenous Management Specialization, College of Commerce, University of Saskatchewan; and Wanda Wuttunee, Native Studies and Aboriginal Business Education Program, I.H. Asper School of Business, University of Manitoba.

16 Despite its commitment in principle to recognizing Aboriginal and treaty rights (as per the *Constitution Act, 1982*) and the inherent right of Aboriginal peoples to self-government (as in Canada 1997), the Canadian state regularly backs away from fully implementing this commitment. In *Van der Peet* (1996), for example, the Supreme Court of Canada imposed restrictive criteria for the recognition of Aboriginal rights, in effect limiting to Eurocentric norms the application of those rights (see Barsh and Henderson 1997). The 2002 *First Nations Governance Act*, though it died on the order paper, was a clear attempt to enforce greater managerial accountability on band councils and restrain Aboriginal self-government (see Ladner and Orsini 2005). More recently, in June 2006, the Harper government refused to ratify the United Nations Draft Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, which proclaims, among other things, the right of Indigenous peoples to self-determination.

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Quality of Life of Aboriginal People in Canada
An Analysis of Current Research
by Daniel Salée, with the assistance of David Newhouse and Carole Lévesque

Résumé

L es questions relatives à la qualité de vie et au bien-
être des Autochtones du Canada occupent une place
de plus en plus importante parmi les priorités de la
politique publique. Depuis la publication du rapport de la
Commission royale sur les peuples autochtones il y a une
dizaine d'années, le gouvernement fédéral et la plupart
des provinces ont formulé et mis en œuvre divers pro-
grammes et plans d'action visant à offrir des réparations
et à améliorer les conditions de vie et le bien-être général
des Autochtones, tant au niveau communautaire qu'indi-
viduel. Cela a entraîné la mobilisation, directe ou indi-
recte, d'un large éventail d'experts et de chercheurs dans
divers domaines des sciences sociales et humaines et des
sciences de la vie, pour se pencher sur l'ensemble des
enjeux liés à la question de la qualité de vie et du bien-
être des Autochtones. Malgré la quantité impressionnante
de connaissances accumulées jusqu'à présent au sujet de
la nature des problèmes et des défis à relever, les respon-
sables politiques restent aux prises avec les disparités
socioéconomiques considérables qui perdurent entre
Autochtones et non-Autochtones.

Dans ce contexte, l'Institut de recherche en politiques
publiques vient de lancer un nouveau programme de
recherche consacré à la qualité de vie des Autochtones du
Canada. Le présent document, qui constitue la première
étape de ce programme, trace un bilan de l'état actuel des
connaissances relatives aux principaux aspects de la
qualité de vie et du bien-être des Autochtones, à certaines
des innovations qui aident à améliorer leurs conditions de
vie et aux liens entre la qualité de vie et la gouvernance
dans les communautés autochtones. L'étude indique
également quels domaines pourraient être approfondis
davantage et propose de nouvelles orientations pour la
recherche en politiques publiques.

Dans la première partie, l'étude se penche sur les
notions voisines de « qualité de vie » et de « bien-être »,
qui font l'objet de définitions et d'explications variées et
parfois contestées. Il importe de bien comprendre ces dé-
finitions et explications, car elles ne sont pas sans mar-
quer et influencer de diverses façons la littérature sur la
qualité de vie des Autochtones. La deuxième partie, qui
constitue le cœur de l'étude, présente une synthèse dans
laquelle sont identifiées et examinées quatre grandes
approches caractérisant la littérature sur la qualité de vie
des Autochtones. La dernière partie s'inspire de cet exa-
men de la littérature pour dresser une analyse critique de
la portée des recherches et de certaines de leurs limites.
L'auteur fait notamment remarquer qu'on n'a pas accordé
assez d'attention à la dimension politique de la qualité de
vie des Autochtones. Il recommande que les futures
recherches consacrées à cette question s'efforcent de
comprendre les liens qui existent entre la lenteur de
l'amélioration des conditions socioéconomiques des
Autochtones et les obstacles politiques qui entravent la
réalisation de progrès véritables.

Summary

Questions pertaining to the quality of life and well-being of Aboriginal people in Canada have become increasingly important priorities on the policy agenda. Since the report of the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples was published a decade ago, both the federal and most provincial governments have formulated and implemented initiatives and action plans designed precisely to offer redress and improve the living conditions and general welfare of Aboriginal communities and individuals. As a result, a wide variety of expertise and research capacity has been mobilized, both directly and indirectly, across several fields of the social sciences, the humanities and the life sciences, to examine the many issues related to the quality of life and well-being of Aboriginal people. Yet, despite the impressive amount of knowledge accumulated so far about the nature of the problems and the challenges, the policy community is still wrestling with the unrelenting persistence of appreciable socioeconomic disparities between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people in Canada.

In this context, the Institute for Research on Public Policy has launched a new research program on the quality of life of Aboriginal people in Canada. As the first step in this endeavour, this paper takes stock of the current state of knowledge about the broad issues related to the quality of life and well-being of Aboriginal people, some of the innovations that are ameliorating their living conditions and the linkages between quality of life and governance in Aboriginal communities. The paper also identifies the areas in which further exploration might be needed, and proposes new directions for policy-relevant research.

The first section considers the notion of "quality of life" and the related concept of "well-being," which are the object of varied and sometimes contested definitions and understandings. These need to be grasped, for they inform and influence the literature on the quality of life of Aboriginal people in different ways. The second, core section of the paper offers a synthesis that identifies and reviews four main approaches characterizing the literature on Aboriginal quality of life. Finally, the last section weaves the threads of the literature review into a critical discussion of the scope and some of the limitations of the research. It argues in particular that insufficient attention has been devoted to the *politics* of Aboriginal quality of life and proposes that future research on the topic should seek to understand the link between the slow pace of improvement of the socioeconomic conditions of Aboriginal people and the political obstacles to real change.